

The
LIKENESS
OF
CHRIST

By THE LATE

THOMAS HEAPHY

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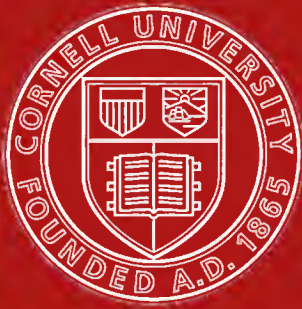
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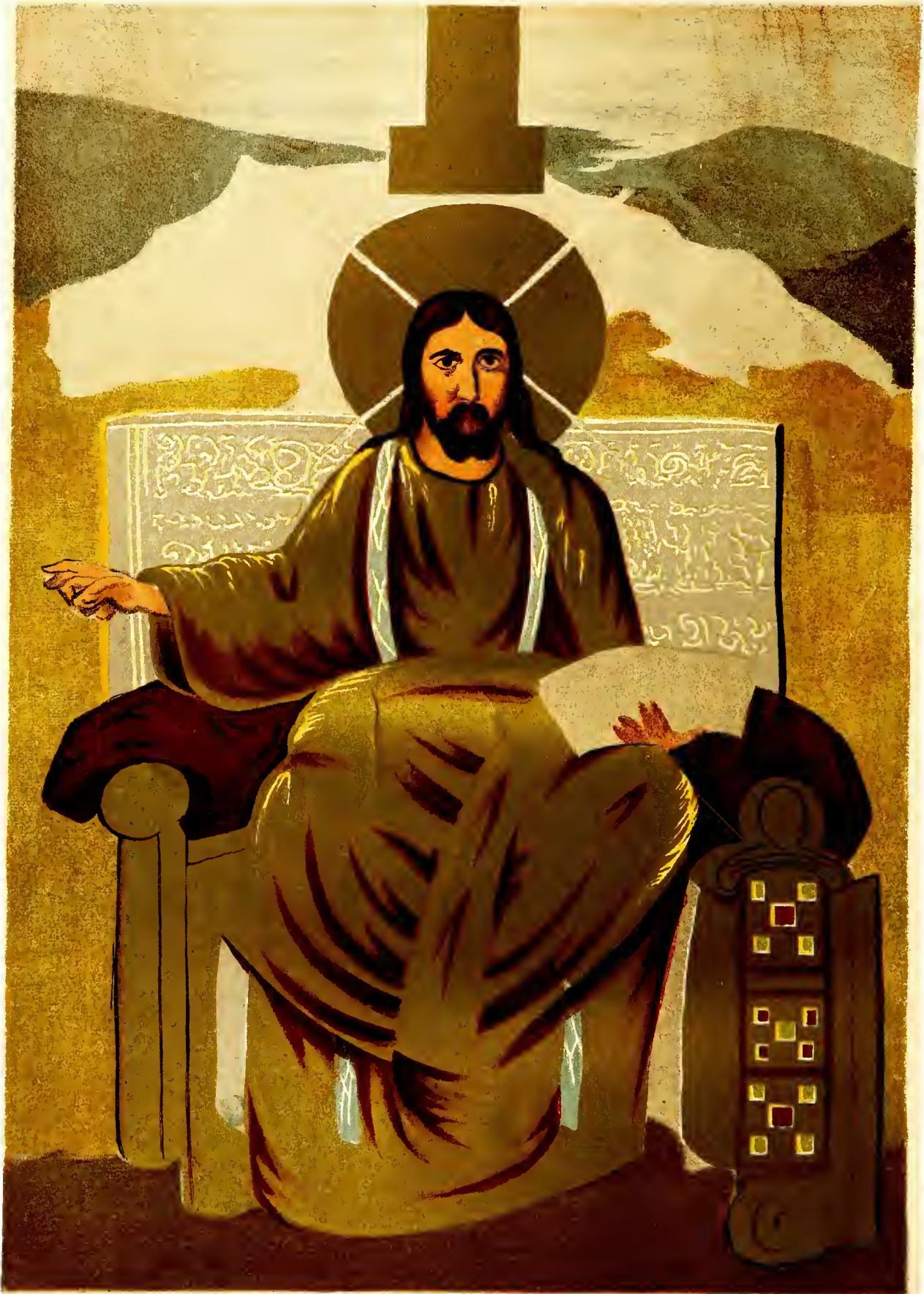
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THE LIKENESS OF CHRIST.

FRONTISPIECE.



MOSAIC FROM THE CHURCH OF ST. PUDENZIANA.

THE
IKENESS OF HRIST:

BEING AN INQUIRY INTO THE VERISIMILITUDE
OF THE RECEIVED LIKENESS OF

OUR BLESSED LORD.

BY THE LATE
THOMAS HEAPHY.

EDITED BY WYKE BAYLISS, F.S.A.,
AUTHOR OF "THE WITNESS OF ART," "THE HIGHER LIFE OF ART," ETC., ETC.

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PREFACE.



MORE delicate or anxious duty can scarcely be conceived than that of preparing for the press the work of an author who has himself passed away; nor would the Editor have dared to undertake such a task unless very special circumstances had compelled him to do so. When Mr. Heaphy died, and it was found that the one work to which he had given the greater part of his life—a life marked by well-fulfilled duty, earnest self-culture, and generous sympathy towards every competitor in the race he was himself running—when it was found that this work had yet to be revised, it was thought best to place the materials he had left in the hands of one who had studied the subject with him, and to whom, more than to any one else, he had confided his thoughts, and plans, and hopes. How easy it is, in looking through the proof-sheets of a friend, to draw the pen through a doubtful passage, or to suggest an alteration. How difficult when that friend can no more speak for himself, to venture to change the turn of a phrase, or to efface a word that he has written. Happily, the value of a work like this is not to be measured by the eloquence of its periods, but rather by the depth of its research, and the cogency of its arguments. In these higher qualities Mr. Heaphy lived to see his work complete. If therefore, notwithstanding the care that has been bestowed upon its revision, errors should still be discovered, the Editor has only to beg that they shall not hastily be attributed to the Author.

WYKE BAYLISS.

NOTE.

THIS work was originally published in folio form in 1880, and was then very favourably reviewed in the *Times*. The edition consisted of only 250 copies, and was soon sold out. It is now difficult to procure a copy. In view of the value of Mr. Heaphy's drawings, of which the originals are now in the British Museum, the Tract Committee of S.P.C.K. have thought it well that the book should have a wider circulation, and have therefore produced this cheap reprint of the original work. In giving it to the world they would beg, however, to disclaim all responsibility for Mr. Heaphy's opinions, and especially for his views as to the antiquity which he assigns to the works of art.

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THE LIKENESS OF CHRIST.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTION.

AMONGST the ideas connected with our Faith that are not absolutely vouched by inspiration, perhaps there is none more universally accepted and cherished by the Christian world than that of the authenticity and verisimilitude of the received Likeness of our Blessed Lord.

While assuming to be evidenced by no such irrefragable authority as that of the sacred canon, it has so associated itself with our thoughts, and so entirely occupied our conceptions, that it forms in our minds an inseparable concomitant of the scenes related therein.

Conversant with it as we all are from our childhood, yet early familiarity, so apt to blunt our sensibility in most things, does not in the least affect the peculiar power—it might be termed eloquence—with which it addresses itself to our understandings.

Transmitted to us from an age in which the productions of pictorial art were either conventional to inanity or utterly debased, it stands entirely by itself for purity, for power of conception, and for a style of Art belonging to no period, and related to none other. Archaic in its grand simplicity, it is yet distinctively individual and portrait-like in its type. Whether portrayed in humility, in suffering, or in triumph; though sometimes severe and rugged, it is still always dignified and majestic. It addresses itself by its infinite tenderness, and at the same time by its strength of character, so directly to the higher sympathies and aspirations of our nature, that we accept it at once with undoubting, almost instinctive, faith, as the veritable counterpart of the Divine original. We can, in fact, hardly imagine any other as possible. And this Divine image, moving and acting amidst the scenes of the Gospel narrative, is perhaps more than anything else indelibly impressed upon the mental retina. We see it meekly submitting to the baptismal rite in Jordan; in contest with the subtle power of darkness in the Desert; teaching a new, and a greater, humanity on the Mount. We even hear from its lips the cry of the very founts of the heart, broken up from their inmost depths at Gethsemane. Wonder-

stricken, we behold it at the supreme moment of "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" We see it in the dark stillness of the three days; at the infinite moment of the Resurrection; and we know, with a mightier conviction than logic or philosophy can impart, that it is the one countenance that we shall all see again.

We have, in fact, received this sacred Likeness so implicitly, and with so unquestioning a faith, that we have hardly cared to examine into its origin, or to acquaint ourselves with the historic data on which it may be supported.

It has, however, been recently questioned by more than one foreign writer of note, *whether we have any evidence at all of the authenticity* (even comparatively) of the received Likeness? One author (M. Didron) considers it to be a compilation of successive generations of artists, a trait of expression having been added by each, or a feature altered, till it became such as we have it now. Another author asserts that an "ideal likeness" sprang into existence as the work and the invention of some unknown artist of the Dark Ages. To support either of these positions it would be requisite to show that there existed a period of the Christian era, however remote, in which the Likeness did not exist. This negative proof, however, these objectors have omitted to supply; and if they cannot supply it, but on the contrary, if the existence of this portrait can be satisfactorily established from age to age up to the first century itself, we may safely dismiss both objections as instances of those destructive theories of which French Positivism on the one hand, and German Neology on the other, are but too prolific.

There can hardly be a doubt that the state of uncertainty (critically speaking) in which the question has remained, has been in great part owing to the confused state of the materials offered for investigation. Numberless pictures doubtless exist of high antiquity, the history of which, could it be extricated from the mass of tradition and legend with which it is intermixed, would probably be conclusive of the question. Tradition is poetic, is patriotic, is religious, is anything but historic or critical; and however tempting the occasion may be to make use of it, yet in an inquiry of this nature, excepting in those cases where it may be supported by extrinsic evidences, we have no choice but to lay it aside. Another difficulty exists in the jealousy with which many of the most important pictures are secluded from the public gaze. In some instances (as is the case with the antique picture at S. Bartolomeo, in Genoa) they may only be viewed on some one particular day in the year; in others, any inspection is simply impossible excepting to some few of the highest dignitaries of the Church. This exclusiveness is the more to be regretted as it exists principally—indeed, I might say, exclusively—with reference to those very works that from their veritable antiquity would be likely to afford the most valuable information.

It is now many years since I made my first journey to Italy to investigate this question. When quite a child I had possessed myself of an old copy of an antique portrait of our Lord, on which, with perhaps childish partiality and enthusiasm, I set an extraordinary value. It was represented as depicted on the folds of a cloth, which was supposed to be suspended from the top corners of the picture, and an inscription below described it as being the true effigy of our Lord, miraculously imprinted on

the cloth as He lay in the sepulchre. I often tried, but could never succeed in bringing myself to accept this last fact ; but the picture was hardly the less valuable in my estimation on that account. As a work of Art it was such as the criticism of the schools would reject ; but never have I elsewhere met with any picture in which was more perfectly represented the calm mystery of death so thinly veiling the Divine life behind. How touching, how soul-appealing were the slightly-parted lips ; the calm brow encircled with the drops still flowing from the thorn wounds ; the nearly-closed eyelids ; the damp, adhesive hair ; and above all the spiritual eloquence of the whole, seeming to say, in the words of an inscription beneath, “ *Thus, that thou mightest live !* ”

I was still a boy when, for purposes of study, I started on a walking expedition into Italy ; and the prospect of seeing the original of my picture, which I learnt from some writing at the back existed in the sacristy of S. Peter's, formed no small part of my anticipations. I arrived at Genoa, where was a picture like mine, but asserted to be “ older and much more sacred, inasmuch as it was actually painted by S. Luke, and sent by our Lord himself to an Eastern monarch.” That it was superior in any respect to mine I could not imagine ; but I desired to see it. This, however, was stated to be impossible, excepting on one day of the year, and then only after confession and other religious observances, to me impossible.

On reaching Rome, my first visit was to S. Peter's. It was night, and the dark mass of the basilica standing out in quiet still sublimity against the blue night sky, reminded me of the quiet stillness of the picture treasured up within. The door was shut ; there was therefore no alternative but to wait till the morrow. I will not stay to describe my impressions when I did enter. I looked round for my picture, but it was not there ; numberless others were there, capital pictures most of them, many magnificent, but the Likeness, in all of them, to my thinking, was but a lifeless copy of mine. Again and again did I search through every chapel and every corner ; it was not to be found. I appealed to an official, but he knew nothing of it. While arguing with him that he must be mistaken, an ecclesiastic in violet robes (I learned afterwards that he was a bishop) mildly asked me what I wanted. Having explained myself, he said that it would be impossible to comply with my request to see the picture ; it was there indeed, kept with other sacred relics in the sacristy, over the large statue of S. Veronica, on whose handkerchief the miraculous picture was imprinted ; but its sanctity was such that no one was allowed to inspect it, excepting the Holy Father and two of the Sacred Conclave, and they only on one day of the year (Palm Sunday), after absolution and communion. In my ignorance I tried the effect of a silver piece on the bishop, but, smiling, he put my hand aside, saying, “ My dear boy, I am sorry, but I can do nothing for you.”

Some years after this occurred, I again visited Italy, as well as other parts of Europe, for the purpose of collecting materials for this work. There was certainly no lack of matter to go upon, but the difficulty was, how to apply it. Christian symbolism spoke an unknown language to me, and I had no one near to interpret it ; so that I was unable to avail myself of the evidence it offered of the antiquity

of those monuments on which it might be employed. I was deficient also in the ability to assign any date to a work from the internal evidence it might offer ; consequently I was unable to evoke anything like order out of the chaos of materials I had collected. I turned my attention to these points, and after the lapse of a few more years, set out on another journey to pursue the same investigation. My studies in Christian symbolism had brought to my notice the existence of Christian antiquities on an extensive scale at Arles in the south of France. Accordingly, I arranged to make that my first resting-place. Being a stranger in the town, I did not know how or where to look for that of which I was in quest. The Gothic churches were numerous, and eminently noteworthy, but they did not contain the thing I wanted. There was, however, a building with the name "Musée" over the door, but it was not open ; and supposing it to contain only the usual objects to be found in the collection of a fifth-rate town, I deferred my visit to it until I had explored the churches and other places where I might expect the Christian monuments to be found. On returning to it in the afternoon it was past the hour for closing ; but a pleasant green lane, by the side of a stream, presenting itself not many yards off, leading towards what looked like a Gothic tower peering above a clump of trees in the distance, I determined on finishing the day in the fields. The lane kept by the stream for about a mile and a half, between rows of wild fig-trees and poplars, with corn-fields and orchards on each side. Soon it became a mere footpath, which, bending to the left in the direction of the Gothic tower, led across the brook, and entered a field covered with high fern and bramble, amongst which, and almost hidden by the undergrowth, were numerous blocks of grey stone, but, as they did not present any feature to call for particular remark, I passed them without further inspection. On crossing a hedge, however, the scene presented a new aspect. Ranged regularly on each side of the path, as far as the eye could reach, were two rows of grey stone sepulchres, placed end to end in close proximity. Soon double and treble rows presented themselves, and then a thickly scattered mass of them, extending far into the fields on each side. I was in the celebrated Christian cemetery. I had asked the direction to it several times, but could get no information ; if I had inquired for the *Eliscamp* (corruption of Elysian fields) I should have been told at once. The monuments were for the most part of the earliest period, as was at once apparent by their construction (to hold two sarcophagi), by the character of the Christian symbols represented on them, and by these symbols being sometimes accompanied by the pagan D. M. (*Diis Manibus*), a practice which, though not infrequent in the first age of the Church, fell into disuse after the second century. Another characteristic of these early Christian monuments is, the entire absence from them of all mention of the rank or position of the deceased. In the infancy of the Church, when every rank of society, from the senator to the slave, was included amongst its numbers, the practice of ignoring earthly distinctions on monuments was the silent but appropriate expression of a creed that recognized all as emancipated in the freedom of the Gospel. Emblems there were, but such only as trod all earthly distinctions in the dust : the anagram of our Lord ; the cross ; the alpha and omega ; sometimes the three combined with a



FROM THE SACRISTY OF ST. PETERS.

circle, the emblem of eternity. Then there was the dove with the olive branch; the leaf fallen from the tree; the fish, typical of the present state of the occupant of the sepulchre as passing through the mystic Jordan; and other emblems, reminding us of many things that in the hurry of this journey of ours we are but too apt to overlook. Neither was any mention made of the virtues of the deceased; a simple expression of affection, with the words "IN PACE," was all that was to be read in the inscriptions. But as we pass a little further, monuments of a later period (twelfth century work), covered with coats of arms and glowing inscriptions, leave us in not a moment's doubt of either the elevated rank or the distinguished virtues of their occupants. This practice may be observed at a later period than the twelfth century, but the simple language that spoke the sure and certain hope of the persecuted convert addresses us, after a lapse of seventeen or eighteen centuries, in language as distinct and as suggestive as when first written; while we regard the blazonry of the heralds, and the long list of boasted virtues, but as of the earth—earthly and unprofitable.

Further on, and at the end of the long line of grey sepulchres, were the remains of a church, parts of which seemed coeval with the cemetery itself, the foundations and portions of the walls being of the construction of the earliest period of our era. After-ages, however, had brought to it considerable additions. The massive tower-like columns—of a breadth vastly disproportioned to their height, solid, simple, without either capital or base, and supporting an arched stone roof—were probably the work of the seventh or eighth centuries; while the entrance, the Gothic tower (that I had seen above the trees), and the walls, richly decorated with frescoes still fresh and brilliant, were probably the production of three centuries later. But the floor of the building was the part that particularly attracted my attention. Ranged thickly over it, leaving barely space to walk between, with the lids off, exposing the remains within, were the earthen pots, the sarcophagi, the coffins, and other receptacles for the dead, from the cemetery outside. Here might be seen a leaden coffin with what was once a bishop, portions of his episcopal paraphernalia still remaining; next, an earthen pot, in which were the ashes of a pagan; next to that, a sarcophagus with the Christian anagram, and some almost powdered bones within. Another receptacle held the dust of one who (from the date attached to it) must have been one of the last of the pagans. A curious person I have often thought this last of the pagans must have been. How strangely he must have felt, with the whole world passed on to another thing, and he still worshipping Pan and Apollo! He may most conscientiously have poured out a libation before sipping his wine; but what of his sacrifices, and what conveniences had he for making them? Beyond question he was one of those wise persons who consider the world to have gone wrong to the exact degree that it had advanced; but was he respected by his neighbours as representing the good old times, or was he jeered at by the boys in the streets? That he held on doggedly to the last may be inferred from an inscription of the seventh century, D. M. M. COELIVS : ANTONN. VIXIT, LXXII.

What I had seen in the evening made me the more impatient to visit the Museum

next day ; so I lost no time in the morning in getting there. Immediately on entering I found myself surrounded with relics in the shape of sarcophagi enriched with sculptures, exquisite glass vases, jewellery, cups, lamps, &c., all affording unmistakable evidence of their Christian origin. This was more than I had looked for ; and on examining the sculptures, I was delighted to find several undoubted instances of the Likeness I was in search of. On one sarcophagus might be seen our Lord giving the Gospels to the Evangelists ; on another, Peter's repentance, with our Lord admonishing him ; on another, the Nativity. Many of these showed indubitable evidences of there having been a then existing and recognized type of likeness, which the sculptor aimed, with more or less success, at imitating. I had thus come



upon a mass of most interesting matter, bearing directly on the especial object of my journey ; and having my drawing materials with me, I devoted some days to making copies of the most interesting of the monuments. These will be given in due order, after others of a still earlier date have been considered.

One beautiful design on a lamp, though it may be somewhat beside the purpose of this work, I cannot refrain from giving, inasmuch as it is the earliest representation of an angel (as depicted in Christian Art) known to exist. In one hand of the Angel is a portrait, surrounded by the emblem of eternity ; in the other hand is the olive or palm-branch. These emblems are particularly characteristic of the poetic imagery prevalent in the allegories of the infant Church.

Another especially beautiful idea was represented on the sarcophagus of an infant,

—an exquisitely conceived figure of our Lord, standing by the Tree of Life, the fruit of which He is bringing to the occupant of the grave. In one sculpture of the Raising of Lazarus, the Likeness and the accessories were depicted under the conventional forms prevalent in the first few years of the Church, an instance of which, from the catacombs of Rome, representing the same subject, and almost precisely similar to the one at Arles, will be given hereafter. A second instance in the Museum, of our Lord presenting the gospels, contained the inscription, “The Lord gives the Word” —a sketch of which is given on this page. Close by might be seen our Lord as the Good Shepherd carrying a wounded lamb across the typical river—“Though thou pass through the waters they shall not overflow thee.” Other works figured the Divine form under the type of Jonah, of Noah, of Abraham. The heads of some of



these had been purposely obliterated by a chisel,—an act to be ascribed either to the religious scruples entertained by some of the first Christians as to the propriety of making any representation of the Divine Person, or to the profanity of the pagan multitude, an especial instance of which will be given presently.

What I had seen at Arles had certainly led me to expect that the earliest and most trustworthy instances of the Likeness I was in search of were to be sought for in the Christian cemeteries; but on my visit to the Roman catacombs I was quite astonished at the abundance of materials with which I was surrounded—fresco-paintings, sculptures, and inscriptions in profusion. But most of the contents, including the glass *tazze* and the metal work, had been removed to the various museums and private collections in the city. How to get at them, and, in the absence of any catalogue or description, how to ascertain their dates or whence they were taken, was the

great difficulty that presented itself. It occurred to me to apply to the Father P. Garrucci, so celebrated for his works on Christian iconography; but I knew not where to find him—besides, I was a perfect stranger in the place. At last a fortunate introduction brought me in contact with the very person who could best help me. The Rev. Father Tebay had long enjoyed an almost European reputation for his erudition in Christian antiquities. On my mentioning to him my purpose and what I stood in need of, I was received with a kindness and attention that it would be difficult to describe. He had himself been engaged some years previously on a somewhat similar subject; but other avocations having obliged him to lay it aside, he placed at my disposal many of the valuable notes made during his investigations, and whatever information I stood in need of respecting dates, the whereabouts of different objects, or the significance of certain symbols, he afforded me with a readiness and kindness to which I can hardly do justice. He also introduced me to the celebrated P. Garrucci, whom I have mentioned above, who gave me much valuable assistance.

Even with Father Tebay's help, however, it was no light work to select and note down those objects that more especially illustrated my subject. I had to look for them in all conceivable places—in the catacombs, in the museums of the Vatican and the Lateran, in the private and reserved cabinets in these museums (shown with an infinity of reluctance and difficulties), in the private collections of the colleges, in the private collections of the laity, in churches, in crypts, in curiosity shops, and even in the curiosity stalls in the streets. Having made what acquaintance I could with such materials as the place afforded, I had next to obtain permission to make copies from such of them as were most suited to my purpose.

I know not from what cause it may proceed, but there exists in Rome a singular disinclination on the part of the officials connected with the museums to show to their full extent the collections committed to their charge. This is the case even with those parts to which free access is permitted. After having visited a place again and again for months, it is no uncommon thing to find that you are still a stranger to the greater, and perhaps the more important, part of the museum; but should there be any room or cabinet to which the regulations allow only of a more restricted access, the difficulties placed by the *custode* in the way of an inspection are often almost insurmountable. Any inquiry for a particular object is usually met by a flat denial of its existence, and it is only after letting the official know that you are certain it is in his possession, that he informs you that an order from the Cardinal Vicar, or some such functionary, is the one thing requisite. On this point also his information is always, and apparently intentionally, incorrect, the functionary to whom he refers you having neither power nor authority in the matter. A return to the museum official only results in a shrug of the shoulders, and a reference again to the same Cardinal. Many of my English friends would suggest a very simple way of overcoming the difficulty; but it is one that, with the class of persons who constitute the official staff of the more important collections, is not readily available. One can offer a few *pauls* to a *custode* in plain clothes, but scarcely to a dignitary of the Church. I had

certainly tried it once when a boy, as I have already said; but the success of the experiment was not such as to encourage me to renew the attempt.

The difficulties in the way of obtaining permission to sketch from a few even of the most accessible objects seemed absolutely insurmountable. Some of the mosaics in the churches seemed to be regarded with peculiar jealousy. Permission to draw in the catacombs could only be obtained from the Cardinal Vicar; but it was of no use applying; it had been granted on one occasion, but would never be again. Certain ancient pictures in the churches were not only too sacred to be copied, but might not even be looked at; others might only be seen on one day of the year, and then but for a very short time. To certain officials in the Vatican the bare suggestion of making a sketch from any of the contents of the cases was enough to make them stand aghast at my audacity; whilst the very existence of some things that I knew to be there was strenuously and vociferously denied. Nevertheless, of every one of these things, before I had done I had made such copies as I wanted; but not without an infinity of needless labour, disappointment, and loss of precious time, was this accomplished. One mosaic in the Church of S. Paul being of especial interest, I ventured to pull out my sketch-book, when I was immediately stopped by a party of Papal *gendarmes* quartered in the building, and my drawing materials searched as if they contained something contraband or dangerous. To my query as to who could give me the requisite permission, the officer in command told me that no one could; the clerk of the works, that the Vicar-general was the person; while a young ecclesiastic mentioned the Major-duomo Inspector of Sacred Apostolic Palaces. This last I found was the most likely person to apply to; but where to find him was the question. First I was directed to the Vatican. He had an office there which no one ever visited. I was then told to try at the Quirinal; and true enough, in a dark subterranean passage under that palace—so dark that it was lighted with gas all day, and so long that it contained the names of more than a hundred different ecclesiastics on more than a hundred doors—did I at length find the name of the Major-duomo. No one answered the bell, but an aperture in the door for letters enabled me to drop my memorial through. After dropping three more memorials through that aperture and several letters entreating an answer, and becoming rather tired, I was informed on the last visit, by a lady who was passing, that no one lived in those apartments, and that the Major-duomo had removed to the other side of the quadrangle. Three weeks more were spent in memorializing *that* side of the palace, with no greater success. At last I was directed to a small attic apartment over the stables—the Major's private residence, the others were only his places of business. Here my first application was at once successful, so far, at least, as seeing the Major was concerned; for on ringing, the door was immediately opened by a fat, jovial old gentleman, in what appeared to be a decided *déshabillé*—nothing being apparent but a fat face, bald head, flannel gown, and bare feet. This dress I found afterwards to be the correct thing for a Dominican, who, being classed amongst the upper two thousand in the Church, is not a little particular on the subject of dress. He received me with a jovial chuckling laugh, which was repeated again and again as I described

my repeated visits to his places of business. At length, putting his hand on my shoulder, he said, "My dear Signior, I can do nothing for you. I really would if I could, but I can't." And as to who could, "Really he did not know. Did I know Monsignor Talbot?" "No." "Did I know Cardinal Wiseman?" "No; but I brought a parcel for him, and before I left England I had been told by his secretary that I might apply to him in any such emergency." "Then," added my friend, "he is the very man. Go to him directly. If he can't do it, no one can." "But is there no regular official to apply to?" "Yes, certainly, I am the proper official; but I can't do it."

Equally unsuccessful results followed my applications to different functionaries for permission to draw in the catacombs and the reserved cabinets of the Vatican, Lateran, &c. I knew nothing of M. Talbot; Father Tebay could not help me in this. In desperation I wrote to Cardinal Wiseman; but I suppose it was owing to his ill-health that I received no answer. A German acquaintance, whom I met whilst on one of my bootless errands, suggested an application to our consul. When he wanted anything of the kind he went to his consul, who got it for him without difficulty. The suggestion seeming a good one, I started off at once for the Via del Croce, and ascended the long stairs to our consul's office. There I received the satisfactory information that I must first obtain some sort of inexplicable communication from the constituted authorities, and the consul would then endorse the application.

This piece of circumlocution nearly exhausted the little stock of patience I had yet left. Had I been in pursuit of anything else, I should have been dead beat. I had been for months engaged in these fruitless applications; the hot season had commenced; the time for my leaving Rome had arrived, and here I was, occupied all day walking in the glaring sun from one office to another without forwarding my purpose one bit. But I was not to be balked; as a *dernier ressort* I would write to Cardinal Antonelli: *he* was despotic in Rome; *he* could do anything. I must confess I did not anticipate success; but in the event of failure, I should, at least, have the satisfaction of knowing I had left no means untried. I wrote my memorial; toiled through the white streets reflecting the burning mid-day sun, up the long stairs of the Vatican—the Swiss guards arranging their walk on each landing so that they kept their eyes on me all the way up—past the gorgeous entrance to the papal apartments, up to the attic story to an ante-room, in which were more than the usual allowance of languishing liveried servants. I left my memorial, and was told to call for an answer in three days. At the end of the three days again through the burning mid-day sun, up the long steps to the ante-room on the attic story. There was "No answer." "Was his Eminence within?" "Yes." I sent in my card. This proceeding brought out an ecclesiastic in violet, who, after a short query and a moment's sharp inspection, commanded me to put down my hat, book, and stick, and follow; and in one moment more I found myself in the smallest, but choicest of apartments—alone with the Cardinal. A kindly shake of the hand, and a most kindly request to know what he could do for me, made me sanguine of success at

once, and I preferred my requests. "Might I have permission to make a slight sketch from the mosaic in the Basilica of S. Paul?" His Eminence looked most gracious. "Might I make some studies in the catacombs?" H. E.'s expression relaxed a little. "Might I make some notes of the objects in the Lateran Museum?" H. E. looked grave; he would do what he could for me. He could not promise; but he would use such influence as he possessed with the respective officials; in any case I should hear from him in three days. His Eminence was delighted to find that I took an interest in these studies. I mentioned the particular purpose I had in view; indeed, without putting a question, he had managed to get it out of me. He entered into it with the greatest apparent interest—the work was an important one—it had never been done—it ought to be done—and he would be gratified if he could be the means of forwarding it in any way. I should hear from him in three days. Emboldened by the reception these requests had met with, I ventured upon the most daring of all: "Would His Eminence obtain for me permission for the penetralia of the Vatican?" This seemed almost too much, but I should certainly hear from him in three days. Two more shakes of the hands (I have since learnt that I ought to have kissed his hand), and I retired delighted. Nor was I disappointed; on the second day came the much-coveted permission (that for the Vatican included), signed by the respective officials, and prominent amongst the rest, by my identical friend of the bare feet and flannel dressing-gown—the Major-duomo.

The permission for the Vatican was of infinitely more importance than the others. Stored up in certain rooms there were precious, inestimably precious, relics, that threw a new and unexpected light on the question I was engaged upon;—a series of pictures of our Saviour and the Apostles, enamelled in gold on glass cups and pateræ of the first and second centuries, beyond description unique, and which had never yet been given to the world.

How elated I was when, one burning day, I walked at eleven o'clock (the opening hour) to the Vatican to present my credentials! The long walk between the white glaring walls reflecting the fierce sun was nothing; I was successful; I had (blessings on Antonelli!) got into the very penetralia of the Vatican, and the precious relics of the Primitive Church would by my means be made known to the world. How little did I then know, notwithstanding the experience I had had, of Italian officials! I presented my order. The principal *custode* was not there; only his *vice*, and he could not admit me, as his superior must first countersign my order. "Where was he?" At prayers somewhere, and could not be disturbed—he was an Archbishop. "Would he be there to-morrow?" "Probably." A repetition of burning walk next day. Museum closed: it was a grand *festa*, though nothing of the kind was apparent in the life outside. Went again next day; museum closed—a minor *festa*. Again next day; museum was closed—a vacation. The next day was Sunday; on the Monday I was sure to see the Archbishop and get my order signed. And sure enough I did see him; but I perceived at a glance my order was anything but agreeable to him. He left me waiting more than an hour, and then informed me that the permission was for five days only, that the five days had already expired; but of his own mere

grace and singular good pleasure he would permit me to study, for that day only. It wanting then but two hours of the time of closing I declined the permission, and I am afraid I was very angry. It was too late to see Cardinal Antonelli, so I went to my friend the Major-duomo. He, however, could do nothing for me; I must go again to the Cardinal. Finally I did get my five days, and some additions afterwards; but it was by dint of such an amount of memorializing, of letter writing, of worrying of officials, and I am ashamed to say of expletive rhetoric, that I am convinced my requests were conceded at last to get rid of my pertinacity.

If the obstructiveness of the superior officials was thus annoying, that of the inferior ones was scarcely less so. One range of catacombs was of particular importance to me from the number and the antiquity of the pictures it contained; consequently I had visited it for purposes of study oftener than the others, and had feed the *custode* accordingly; but, on showing my drawings to a person well acquainted with the place, he remarked that I had omitted to notice several works that bore particularly on my subject. Professing myself quite ignorant of their existence, he offered to go with me and point them out. Being well acquainted with all the countless ramifications of the catacombs, he took me at once to a series quite new to me, and underlying those in which I had been making my studies. I at once saw the value of the works that I had overlooked, and turning angrily on the *custode*, who had received so many of my fees, asked him why he had not shown me these: "He did not know that his Signior wished to see them."

I was in a dilemma. I could not neglect the valuable material thus unexpectedly brought to my notice; but my stay in Rome was limited to a few hours—till the next day at farthest. I therefore determined to get the studies I wanted by passing the night in the catacombs. Some objections were made by the man in charge of them, but these yielding to the usual arguments, it was arranged that I should go down immediately and be forgotten, and that I should be called for at an early hour in the morning. I provided myself with candles to last the required time, and a box of lucifer matches, and having adjusted other preliminaries, I descended. I must confess to having felt an undefinable sensation on hearing the door closed and locked behind me, and finding myself alone, some eighty feet below ground, in the long dark passages, the only living being amidst the thousands of dead lying around me. I hesitated a moment; but remembering I had so often been down before during the day, and that night could make not the least difference, I went on. Deeming it most prudent to commence proceedings by assuring myself, beyond the possibility of a doubt, that I knew my way, I determined to make notes of distances and of such things as I passed. I had some distance to go underground, and numerous turnings to make through the narrowest passages, one of which was so exactly like another that it was almost impossible to distinguish between them. Further on, my path lay through ground with which I was unacquainted; I made notes therefore in my sketch-book of every object I passed that might serve as a landmark; I also counted the number of passages to the right and to the left, and especially noted the position of a yawning well or chasm, that lay without parapet or guard right in my path, and



FROM THE CHURCH OF ST. BARTOLOMEO, GENOA.

which communicated perpendicularly with a still lower series of excavations. Then there was the inclined plane to be marked that led me down through endless windings and abrupt turnings to the series of catacombs below. Having carefully noted all these things, and especially the position of a long tier of open graves in which the remains were in a remarkable state of preservation, I retraced my steps to the entrance-door, to assure myself that I knew the way back; and the result being satisfactory, returned and commenced my operations. I was soon so engaged on my work as to quite forget the novelty of my position. I suppose it must have been about midnight, or a little later, when I began to feel just a little sleepy, but some biscuits, and a cigar afterwards, quite set me going again. There were three pictures to be copied; two of them were done, and the third (Adam and Eve in Paradise) would occupy, I calculated, about two hours and a half. How long this picture took me I don't know; but I had brought candles to last, as I thought, till four in the morning or rather later. The last of these, however, was getting very low, so I proceeded with my work with all speed, intending when it was done to ascend the long flight of steps, and if the door was still locked to wait there till the man came to open it; a light in that case would not be necessary, as the crevice at the bottom would admit enough from without to make objects in the immediate vicinity clearly discernible. My calculations were not, however, quite accurate; for as my work proceeded it assumed the character of a race between it and the candle, which would be done first. It was a very close thing at the finish; for by the time my drawing materials were put up there was not above one inch of candle remaining, and even this was deceptive; for, as it turned out afterwards, the wick did not extend above half way into it.

The perils I encountered during this night in the catacombs, in total darkness, and the difficulties I had to surmount in finding my way out, I must, however, leave to the imagination of my readers.

Having remarked on the obstructiveness of the Roman officials, I cannot forbear mentioning one notable exception, and acknowledging the ready and valuable assistance that, with the true instinct of a man of learning and genius, was always extended to me by the Principal of the Roman College, the celebrated P. Garrucci. The establishment under his keeping includes a collection of Christian antiquities second only to that of the Vatican, and though engaged himself on publications connected with its contents, he was always ready to afford me facilities for making what studies I required.

Not being mentioned in the usual guide-books, and access to it being somewhat restricted, the Museum of the Roman College is one (amongst the many collections in Rome) which, abounding in interest, is still utterly unknown to the great proportion of our travelling country-people. The works that I copied from this collection will be given in their respective order, with the exception of one of them, which, from its singular significance, and its bearing on what I shall have to say afterwards, it is better to describe at once.

During the alterations and extensions that were made from time to time in the

palace of the Cæsars, it was found necessary to build across a narrow street that intersected the Palatine in order to give support to the structure above. The portion of the street thus walled off remained sealed against light and air till about three years since, when some excavations that were being made in the Palatine exposing it to view, it was instantly perceived that the walls of the ancient street were covered with *grafitti*, or scribblings, similar to those on the walls of Pompeii. Father P. Garrucci was amongst the first who visited the place, and his practised eye at once detected from amongst the rest what proved to be a rude sketch, or pagan caricature, of the crucifixion of our Lord. It will be seen that this blasphemous sketch represents a figure in the attitude of worship adopted in those days—the arm uplifted and outstretched. (See Job xxxi. 27; 1 Kings xix. 18; also Juvenal's "*a facie jactare*



manus.") This figure is turned towards a cross, to which is affixed a figure with the head of (what appears to be) a wild ass; and all possible doubt about the purport of it is dispelled by the inscription beneath, "ΑΛΕΞΑΜΕΝΟΣ ΣΕΒΕΤΕ (σεβεται) ΘΕΩΝ," "*Alexamenos worships God.*"

It is not my purpose to touch upon the higher associations which this strange discovery presses on the mind; but even as a purely historical monument, the most unimaginative reader will at once regard it with the deepest interest, carrying us back as it does, with a distinctness that no written words could supply, to that dark period of the infant Church when its Divine Founder was still "foolishness" to the Gentile, and when it was still possible to present Him to the pagan population under the hideous and revolting type of folly which is here depicted.

CHAPTER II.

PORTRAITS OF THE FIRST FOUR CENTURIES, FROM THE CHRISTIAN CEMETERIES.



THE works of Art known to exist that may lay claim to a high antiquity, and amongst which we may look for early instances of the Likeness of our Saviour, may be classed thus :—

1. Mosaics, executed at ascertained periods, between the second and the seventh centuries.

2. Pictures on unprepared linen cloth, executed in a material similar to transparent water-colour, to be ascribed to a period probably antecedent to the third century, and generally purporting to be the handkerchief of S. Veronica, and the image depicted to have been caused by direct application of the cloth to the face of our Lord.

3. Pictures, evidently of high antiquity, executed *in tempera* on wood, of Eastern or Byzantine origin, and traditionally ascribed to S. Luke.

4. Metal work, executed during the Ostro-Gothic occupation of Italy, when other kinds of Art were almost impracticable.

5. Sculptures, frescoes, and designs worked upon glass and other materials, taken from the Christian cemeteries, and executed during the first four centuries.

Of the classes above enumerated the last is by far the most important, both on account of the unquestionable antiquity of the objects it includes, and the general excellence of their preservation. To comprehend their full value, some detailed account of the places whence they were taken will be requisite, and as first in importance it will be best to commence with the Roman catacombs.

It was to be expected that the converts to a creed which taught the doctrine of the resurrection of the body amongst its principal tenets, would learn to view with something like abhorrence the practice of incremation, to which as pagans they had been accustomed. To our modern conceptions the disposal of our mortal remains, however it may be effected, presents no obstacle to the accomplishment of the final restoration ; but various circumstances concur in forcing on us the conviction that the earlier converts to Christianity entertained more confined ideas on the subject. To them it was a point of vital importance that some portion of the mortal remains,

however small, should be implanted in and combine with the earth, it being apparently held by them that a new power, a capacity of fructification and development, was thereby imparted. They considered that the process of burning was an avoidance of that condition of corruption that must precede the incorruptible. The seed that was sown must germinate in darkness before it could rise to the light of another day : but how to effect this disposal was the difficulty. In many cities, in Rome for instance, to bury in the ground in the sight of the populace, even in times when the sect was not persecuted, was simply impossible. The temples, the gardens, and places of public resort, would, in pagan eyes, be profaned by the presence of a corpse. The obstacle was, however, not insurmountable. Around the city, possessed of gardens and villas, lived many of the richer converts to the new Faith. These persons naturally resorted to the more secluded parts of their own property to plant that precious seed which had fallen from their own tree—a privilege that was readily extended to the friends and dependents of the household, and in most cases to the members of the Church generally. The excavations thus formed were extended as occasion arose, and took the form of narrow passages, generally about six feet in height and three in width ; the receptacles for the dead being ranged in horizontal tiers one above the other on the sides of the passages, precisely similar to the construction of berths round the cabin of a passenger vessel. The vicissitudes of the Church soon provided other uses for these subterranean chambers. In times of persecution, the public assembling of the people for Christian worship was attended with considerable danger ; accordingly, small chambers or chapels were added to the excavations, in which the sacred mysteries might be celebrated in comparative security, to which children and catechumens might resort for instruction, and which might serve as the cathedral or seat of the bishop—this last use being evidenced by the frequent chair or *cathedra* cut in the rock, and generally to be found near the resting-place of some noted saint or martyr. With the spread of the new religion these cemeteries required frequent and considerable extensions ; and we find them in many instances ranged in stories one above the other, and of some miles in extent. From the fact of these being so frequently met with beneath the city of Rome and the surrounding Campagna, it has been supposed that they communicated with each other, and thus, much larger dimensions have been attributed to particular cemeteries than the facts warrant. As far as can be ascertained, however, they exist, as might have been expected from the nature of their origin, in separate and distinct series.

Though the necessity which existed for places of subterranean burial during the persecution of the Church ceased with the conversion of the empire, the practice was not wholly discontinued. Churches were built and decorated, and consecrated cemeteries on the surface of the land were provided with a lavish hand by Constantine and the Empress Helena. But to human affections and sympathies the place which held the ashes of kindred who had gone before, and that was hallowed by the presence of those glorious Christian warriors whose “ blood, shed for the testimony,” had now fructified into a triumphant Church, had a consecration beyond all others. Accordingly, for purposes of interment they were still occasionally resorted to, until,

as a matter of expediency, and to prevent the disturbance of existing sepulchres by those who considered they would be safer if they could possess themselves of a resting-place in close proximity to the dust of some one who had shed his blood for the Faith, an edict was issued by Pope Damasus, in the year 365, closing the cemeteries to interment, and indeed to access generally. But the victory of the Church, though decisive, was not final. Another century saw pagan Ostro-Goths occupying the Christian metropolis, desecrating the temples of God, and driving the Christian flock once more to seek shelter in "the caves of the ground" from the fiery whirlwind of persecution that again swept over the land. Here they were pursued and slaughtered with a fury scarcely equalled in the worst times of the pagan Cæsars. The tombs of the saints and martyrs were desecrated, and their ashes strewn in the streets of the city or flung into the Tiber. The storm was violent but evanescent, and again the Church enjoyed peace. But in order to prevent any further disturbance of the precious ashes lying beneath, it was determined to close and to effectually conceal the entrances to the subterranean chambers, retaining those only that opened into convents (which were afterwards fortified for their further protection) or into concealed places in the crypts of churches. These latter were soon walled up and forgotten; while with respect to those that opened into the convents, it was discovered by the more astute among the holy brotherhood that the moderate and unvarying temperature of the rock chambers beneath exercised a peculiarly preservative and maturing effect on wine; consequently, in more than one instance, the consecrated vaults were utilized as the convent wine-cellars—a requisite space being appropriated, and the remainder walled off in consideration of the superstitious fears or imaginings of the weaker brethren. In the course of centuries these walled-up portions were forgotten, and the very existence of many of the catacombs became, till a comparatively recent period, a matter of speculation.

There cannot be a doubt that there exist under the surface of the Campagna, other of these cemeteries that have not yet been explored, and which are, probably, as rich in undisturbed works of Art and antiquity as any that have yet been opened. It is to be hoped that when these are discovered, their precious contents will meet with more considerate and enlightened treatment than has hitherto been extended to such relics of the past.

Of those that have been explored, the contents (mortal remains included) have, in some instances, been carried away no one knows whither; in others they have been wantonly and totally destroyed; while such as have escaped, and would bear removal, have been placed in the museums of the Vatican and the Lateran, or exist unarranged and uncatalogued in different parts of the Papal residences. Fortunately, enough remain to afford most important information on the subject of this inquiry.

A first entry into one of these subterranean cemeteries, where the mortal furniture and decorations remain undisturbed, is singularly impressive. An opening in the ground small enough to be easily hidden by brambles and tall grass; a steep flight of steps cut in the loose crumbling rock, descending to a depth of forty, sixty, or perhaps eighty feet; a massive door, strongly barred, but the material so rotten as

to give way to a very slight touch; a few more steps, and then a long narrow passage, just wide enough to pass along without much inconvenience. In utter darkness and eternal stillness the long passage goes on and on; the occasional openings into other passages—dark and silent, and apparently as interminable as the first—only adding a deeper gloom. The first feeling of bewilderment and awe, at the strangeness of the scene, having passed away, we observe the sides of the passage thickly covered with white marble slabs—upon which are engraved characters, clear and sharp as when fresh from the mason's chisel—memorials of the dead that for fourteen, fifteen, perhaps eighteen centuries have lain behind.

A few inches within the walls of this dark narrow passage, lie in tiers one above the other, and so close that not another could be placed between, the bones, or in some instances the mere concave shape in a mass of dust, of the first converts to our Faith. Still the long narrow passage goes on and on, and still continually branches off into others, repetitions of itself. Frequently interspersed among the white tablets, are small recesses—scarcely large enough to thrust the hand into—inside which have been found small bottles, apparently of silver or of mother-of-pearl, but really of decayed glass: they fall into the finest flakes on the slightest touch. These are lachrymatories, or tear-bottles, dry enough now beyond all question, however full they may have been once.¹

The portion of the cemetery we have just passed through is that which was first excavated, and, in all probability, contains the remains of the earliest Christian converts. A Church must have existed in Rome from a period almost immediately succeeding the resurrection of our Lord, as S. Paul wrote his Epistle to the Romans in the year 58, when the Church was already numerous, and "their faith spoken of throughout the world." That these were the earliest interments is also evidenced by the fact of some pagan usages having been still retained. The Christian anagram is certainly on the tablet, but human affection, under such circumstances, is loth to part with its old modes of expressing itself, and the lachrymatory and the pateræ are no less certainly found below. But as we go further on through the dark passage we come upon another generation, for the series of white tablets is now often interrupted by a picture, a portrait perhaps of the person lying behind. These pictures, which must have existed in lonely darkness through the long centuries, seem replete with a meaning and significance peculiarly their own. In comparison with the inanimate objects and the withering dust around—nay, even with our own selves, they appear to be the real living inhabitants of the place; the flickering light gives them motion, they seem to watch us, and actually to turn their eyes on us as we pass along. Soon we come to a group of smaller figures, a picture in three compartments—our First Parents in the act of their disobedience; a medallion portrait of the occupant of the grave, with uplifted hands in the attitude of prayer; then a figure of a Shepherd

¹ Lachrymatories, containing what appears to be dried blood, are invariably to be found in the graves of martyrs. That the dried red substance was blood, would appear from the fact that Leibnitz, after experimenting on this substance with various re-agents, states, in a letter to M. Fabretti, that he could find nothing it resembled but desiccated congealed blood.



carrying a wounded lamb across a stream (the mystic Jordan). This figure, of infinite sweetness, gentleness, and power, is one which we all know; the whole picture embodying the hope and creed of him or her whose mortal garment lies behind—"As in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive." Presently we come to other pictures, eloquent of the same eternal hope: our Lord distributing the Bread of Life; the Raising of Lazarus; the River of the Water of Life, in contradistinction to the dark waters of Jordan full of living fish, the symbol of the Christian flock passing through the dark wave in their journey hence.¹ Passing on we come to a shorter passage, and entering we find it expand into a vaulted chamber, some three or four yards square, covered above and around with pictures and gilding. On three of the sides are projections like rude seats: these are the tombs of martyrs, and the chapel has been cut and decorated in their honour. In one corner may be seen a chair carved in the rock, for this chapel is also a cathedral, and a Roman bishop in times of persecution had his seat here. But these pictures are not mere idle, fanciful decorations—they had a high purpose. They represent scenes from the Scriptures, illustrating those tenets of the Christian Faith that more especially distinguish it from that of the idolaters. This chapel or cathedral was also a school, where children and catechumens came to be instructed in times when they could not be so safely assembled above ground, and these pictures were doubtless placed there for their instruction. Penetrating still further we come upon pictures differing somewhat from those we saw at first. The Old Testament is here generally resorted to for subjects: Noah in the Ark, or in the act of leaving it; Moses striking the Rock; and, especially, the story of Jonah. We are also somewhat surprised at meeting with subjects from the pagan legends: Orpheus and the Beasts, Apollo, and many others. These seem strangely out of place, but their significance we shall see presently. Richly carved sarcophagi will be met with; the subjects sculptured on them, like those of the paintings, all typical of the one great consolatory hope, and most of them repeating more or less perfectly that same Likeness we all know so well. Still we go further on in the apparently endless passage, penetrating the wilderness of cross-passages, descending steep steps to lower stories, and yet again to lower still, and throughout we find the same chapels, the same tablets, the same pictures and sculptured sarcophagi, all embodying the same eternal hope. At length, as we go further, we perceive a change: the places of interment are not so regular and orderly as they were, nor so much decorated. Occasionally a space has been cut through a picture to allow of a resting-place behind, and we notice other irregularities. The time of Constantine had come, the Church was emancipated and had inherited the

¹ Though the representation of fish in a stream is understood to be typical of the passage of the Christian flock through Jordan, or death, this is but a lateral branch of its principal signification. In other instances, a fish is expressly typical of our Lord himself. It was held, in the first ages of the Church, that the ancient Sibyls had prophesied many things truly of our Lord, hence their occasional representation in Christian churches. The figure of a fish, as typical of our Saviour, is held to have originated in the famous acrostic verses of the Roman Sibyl, as quoted by St. Augustin and Eusebius (S. Aug. de Civ. Dei, xviii. 23; and Euseb. in Orat. Const. c. 18), the initial letters of the titles of our Lord, with which each verse commences, making up the Greek word, *ΙΧΘΥΣ*, a fish: *Ιησους Χριστος, Θεου Υιος, Σωτηρ*.

land, and the necessity for care in these things had become less urgent. The long dark passages still go on, but they are fallen in, or on other accounts are no longer safe, and we are forced to return.

We have so far been taking a cursory glance only at the general appearance of these things; let us now examine them a little more closely. How exquisitely touching are the loving words engraved on the tablets; how full of the eloquence that could not express itself in words is the simple inscription, "To the sweetest of women," "DVLCISSIMAE FEMINAE IN PACE;" and again, "To the sweetest of wives, who lived twenty-two years," "CONIVGI DVLCISSIMAE VIXIT XXII." We read, not that Ulpia is buried, but that Ulpia is decorated. Look inside where Ulpia's mortal clothing lies. A space scarcely larger than a hand, and a few, a very few, fragments of bones, are but too indicative of the



kind of crown that Ulpia now wears. "Eutychia, happiest of women," lies next. Behind the stone which bears her name is a larger aperture, and there calmly lying—is all that once was Eutychia. At her feet, imbedded in the mortar, is a glass cup, decorated with figures wrought in gold—representing our Saviour raising Lazarus. The execution is rude, and the Likeness is not there; for the period at which it was executed was so early that no information of what our Lord was like had reached the artist. On the breast of Eutychia's apparel, or more probably fallen between its folds, will be found a small glass ornament, once suspended by a cord: on this is also a picture—our Lord bringing the Fruit of the Tree of Life—

again the all-consolatory hope that lives and breathes over everything in the place. Outlines of these will be found on the preceding page.

Many of the catacombs in their present condition (though some of their contents have been removed), present even now an appearance but little differing from the above description. The passages, the chapels, the pictures, and many of the tablets, are still undisturbed. Some of the tablets, however, are now in the museums of the Vatican or the Lateran, where also are the sarcophagi, with notes referring to the places whence they were taken. The cups, pateræ, and lachrymatories are for the most part in the same museums, but portions even of some of these may still be seen, embedded in the mortar, in the positions they originally occupied. This is more especially the case in the cemeteries of S. Callisto, S. Agnese, and SS. Achilli e Nereo.

The picture I have drawn above might be much more filled in; many things which the excavations have revealed to us are interesting and suggestive in the extreme; but not being immediately connected with the purposes of this inquiry, it will suffice merely to allude to them. Some of the apartments in the Vatican—not easily accessible to the public—are particularly rich in these Christian memorials, many of which are of a beauty that can scarcely be described. The cups of blue and lilac glass with the gold figures on them, such as we mentioned above, are in some instances worked to a degree of finish perfectly wonderful; one especially, upon which are the portraits of a man with his wife and child, in the costume of the time of Trajan, is quite a marvel of accuracy of detail and purity of style, equalling in these respects anything that has been done in the best period of Art. Vases of exquisite proportions and workmanship, to which the decay of the glass has given the appearance of being carved in pearl; amulets, armlets, and other jewellery in gold, silver, and bronze, generally repeating the usual symbols of the Christian's hope. Tools of workmen; hideous implements of torture; carved ivory figures, or rather their remains; images in metal-work of the Ostro-Gothic period, choicely worked with enamel; these, and an infinity of other suggestive matter may be found there, the description of which would at present be rather beside my purpose.

The illustrations of this chapter are from specimens of Christian Art, which, if not older, must be at least as old as any existing. From whatever cause it may proceed, they seem to have escaped general notice hitherto;—a fact to be the more wondered at, considering the important link they supply in a chain of evidence that leads us back, distinctly and clearly, to the very earliest period of our era. It is, indeed, almost impossible to overrate their importance in this respect; and I shall presently enter into some arguments in support of their antiquity. But it will be difficult to perceive the full force of the reasoning I shall adopt, unless these works are considered together with others on a larger scale, which belong to the same age, and with which they were associated in the same cemetery. I will only observe here that they are unquestionably of the first period of the Church: Tertullian, who wrote A.D. 150 or 160, referring to them as productions that had once been common, but had ceased to be made before his period, on account of the use of glass being superseded by that of metal for sacramental vessels.

These pictures were in every instance executed on the bottom of either a glass cup or patera, which is understood to have held some portion of the sacramental elements, and to have been deposited in the grave at the time of burial. The practice was an expression of the divine hope which it was the effort of the early Christians to depict, under every conceivable form of symbol and allegory, in the places consecrated by the remains of those departed in the Faith. Some have considered the use of these cups and pateræ but as the continuance of the pagan practice of burying food with a deceased person, though this would in no way affect the question of the antiquity of these relics. It may be observed, however, that the testimony of Tertullian to the effect that the sacramental cups (in glass) of the first Christians were ornamented with the portraits of our Saviour, would seem to leave the question no longer in doubt. Eusebius in the fourth century also mentions the painted images of the Apostles, handed down from ancient times on the eucharistic vessels. Again, Irenæus, who lived in the apostolic age, mentions the use of glass cups in the sacred mysteries of the Church; and the words ΠΙΕ ΖΗΧΗC¹ (Drink, and live), inscribed upon them, are susceptible of none other than the Christian interpretation.

The causes that operated to preserve these works require particular mention. At the bottom of the glass cup, or plate, was a projecting rim, precisely similar to what may be seen on the same articles in the present day. It was within this rim, on the outside of the vessel, that these figures were depicted. Immediately previous to a grave being required, it was covered with a layer of thick mortar (as may be evidenced in many instances, where the mortar shows not only the impression of the body, but of the threads of the linen in which it was wrapped); the glass cup, or plate, placed by the side of the departed sank slightly into the mortar, and the golden picture on the bottom being thus embedded, escaped the destructive effects of the atmosphere, which, acting on other parts of the glass, has corroded it to such a degree that on the slightest touch it falls into thin prismatic fragments. Thus the engraved portion remains sound and hard, but with the mortar adhering to it so firmly that in many instances it has been judged prudent to make no attempt at its removal.

These instances of the Likeness, however, are not intended as examples of complete and expressive portraiture, but only as indicating that there existed at that time a recognized type. As soon as the artists or workmen of Rome became acquainted with the Likeness they considered it incumbent on them to endeavour to reproduce it in their work; and many of their works are as good copies as could be

¹ These letters are according to the transcript made by Mr. Heaphy from the original pateræ in the Museum of the Lateran. There can be little doubt, however, that the sixth letter should be I, not C. It will be seen by the next paragraph of what frail material these relics consist, and how easily a flaw might occur in the removal of the mortar in which they were embedded. The inscription should read ΠΙΕ ΖΗ IHC. The use of the first three letters of our Saviour's name, IHS, or in its old form, IHC, is well known,

expected, considering they were executed by unpractised hands,¹ on a minute scale, and in an intractable material. And these works afford sufficient evidence that the particular traits—such as the hair parted in the middle, flowing to the shoulders, and beginning to curl or wave from the ear downward—the thin beard, the hair upon the lip, and the oval face—were recognised as distinguishing characteristics of the true Likeness, even at that early period.

The first illustration on page 20, representing the Raising of Lazarus, may be instanced as an example of that early date when no information respecting the actual Likeness of our Lord had reached the artist. It will be perceived that the conception of the whole scene, and its mode of treatment, are rude and unlearned. The absurdly small figure of Lazarus, the mode of delineating the sepulchre, the attitude and general design of the principal figure, were all mere reproductions of the worn-out conventionalities of contemporary pagan art. It is not, however, without traces of the deep, poetic tone of thought so characteristic of the early Christian Church. The figure of Lazarus has already descended the steps of the sepulchre by the sole power of the Divine word, his bandages preventing the use of any muscular exertion. Again, the idea of the Tree of Life growing out of the tomb is conceived in the happiest vein of allegory. It is executed in gold on a sky-blue ground; and from the mode of spelling the name, added to the reasons which will be given presently, there is cause to believe it to be the production of a period little later than the middle of the first century. A work in fresco from the catacombs of SS. Achilli e Nereo, and a sculpture from the cemetery of Arles, will be given in the next chapter, as instances of treating the same subject in a manner so precisely similar that it is difficult to avoid the belief that all three were copied from some previously existing work.

The illustration in this page is a work in many respects similar to the last, inasmuch as it once formed an ornament to be worn from the neck, and represents either the Resurrection of our Lord, or Noah leaving the Ark: for the purpose of this argument it is no matter which. The two marks on the sides of the hands may represent either the two doves liberated by Noah, or the Alpha and Omega: but being almost obliterated, it is now impossible to say which. In this work the Likeness (small as it is) is well rendered, and the execution of the whole is good, though the ark or the sepulchre (the marks of stones would imply the last) is rudely conceived. This and some others are executed in gold on deep ruby glass, and may be ascribed either to the end of the first or the beginning of the second century.



¹ This mode of representing figures in gold upon glass was probably the invention of the first Christians, as no other instances of the art are known to exist.

On page 20 is another drawing of a glass ornament, of the nature of a medal or a locket, intended (as is apparent from the form of the top) to be worn round the neck, suspended by a chain or cord : it was in this position that it was found in the tomb of a female, in the catacombs of S. Agnese. Some consider the figure to be that of Jonah ; but if it be so, the fact makes but little actual difference, for (as will be explained afterwards) it would, in that case, still be typical of our Saviour, who was often represented under other names, for reasons that were at that time of ample sufficiency. The figure is, however, generally held to represent our Saviour bringing the fruit of the Tree of Life, and the two marks nearly obliterated on each side of the head can hardly, from their position, be other than the Alpha and Omega indicative of the Sacred Person. The serpent on the outside the (emblem of eternity) readily lends itself to the same interpretation ; and the ornament itself having been



worn round the neck of one who was looking in full assurance for the event of which the image is so clearly typical, leaves but little doubt of its real meaning. The true Likeness in this work is more apparent than in any of the preceding, although the scale on which it is represented is more minute. It is executed in gold on glass of a lilac colour.

The outline above is an instance of what may appropriately be termed the transition of the type, having been apparently executed at a time when some information respecting the more obvious traits in the true Likeness had reached Rome, and the artist felt no longer at liberty to adopt the mere conventional type of a Roman youth, but aimed at giving such distinctive features to the portrait as he was able to do from the partial information that had reached him. We see in this instance that our Saviour, who is represented as giving the crown of life to S. Peter

and S. Paul, is delineated with the hair divided in the middle (distinctly contrary to the fashion of that day) and with a beard—being so far an approximation to the true type. But, on the other hand, the hair is not of the proper length, and the face is too round. One thing to be specially noted is, that the portraits of the two Apostles were at that time already depicted under an easily recognized type of character, as will be seen by comparing this picture with others on pages 27 and 31, in which the short curled hair, bare forehead, and thickset features of S. Peter are at once discernible, and afford internal evidence of its being a direct portrait Likeness. In the representation of S. Paul also the countenance is scarcely less characteristic; the long, rather scant, and pointed beard, long features, and general expression, all proclaim an effort at producing a recognizable portrait. A number of other portraits of these Apostles exist in the same compartment of the Vatican, in each of which a



prevailing and unmistakable type is obvious at a glance. In one instance, however, it is S. Paul who is represented as slightly bald, while S. Peter is not so; in other respects the traits of feature and character are identical.

It will be seen that the principal figure is here represented with a nimbus. Certain authorities have erroneously referred the first use of this symbol to a later period. It is clearly established, however, that instances of it may be met with from the earliest centuries; indeed it may be seen on pagan deities of a date antecedent to the Christian era. This work is executed on a bright blue glass, and was taken some years since from the catacombs of S. Sebastian.

The illustration above, representing our Saviour bestowing the Crown on Timothy and Justus, is an example of an advance in the direction of the true Likeness, the hair being of the recognized length, and curling on the shoulder. No hair on the lip is

apparent, but this appears to be owing to an injury to the work. The two persons here represented—Timothy and Justus—will at once occur to the reader as being mentioned in the Epistles of S. Paul. As it is hardly probable that they would have been depicted long after their death, their introduction here supports the evidence that will be given presently as to the date of these works. The Alpha and Omega, borrowed doubtless from the imagery of the Apocalypse, will be seen on each side of the head of the principal figure. This picture is executed in gold on a beautiful pale green ground.

The next illustration represents our Lord changing the water into wine (typical of the change of our body from the corruptible to the incorruptible). This is of the



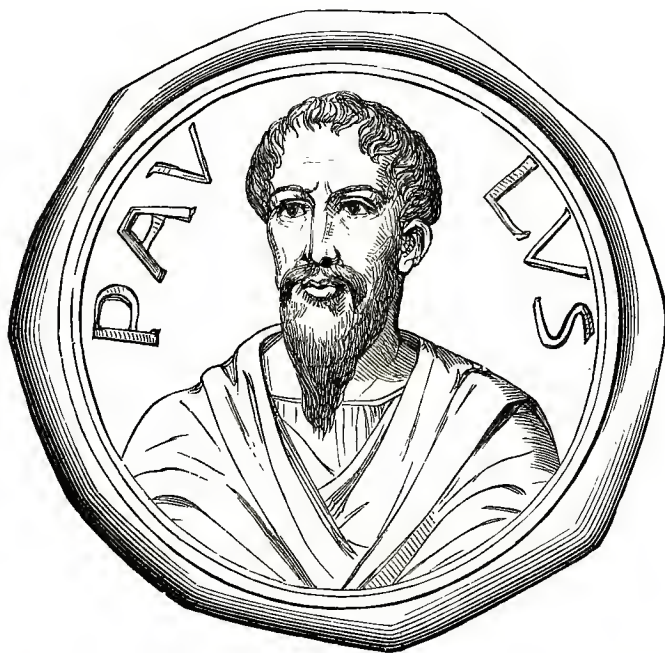
whole series the best executed and the closest approximation to the true Likeness ; unfortunately, the mouth is obliterated ; but the well delineated hair and beard, the shape of the face and features, as far as they are discernible, evidence the true and recognized character. On the right of the sacred figure is an emblem which has been held to represent the septiform Spirit of God, or the Seven Spirits (mentioned in the Revelation) that stand before the throne of the Almighty. What the emblem on the left signified before it was obliterated, it is now impossible to say. It will be seen that there are here *seven* vessels represented instead of the “six water pots of stone” mentioned in the Gospel. That this was no unintentional error is certain from the fact that, often as the subject is represented in the catacombs, seven vessels are



FROM THE CHURCH OF ST SILVESTRO, ROME.

invariably introduced. This has been explained by assuming either that the work was executed before an intimate knowledge of S. John's Gospel had become general in the Church, or that the narrative was purposely departed from in order to introduce the mystic number ; but this last explanation it would be difficult to accept. The picture is executed in gold on a lilac ground, and may be attributed, like the others, to the earliest period of the Church.

The last of this series is from a well executed and expressive representation of



S. Paul. The character and expression are powerfully and distinctly given ; and any portrait painter will at once see that it is a transcript from a recognized type of likeness. Remembering that shortly before it was executed (if not at the very time), S. Paul was a well-known and easily-recognized individual in the streets of Rome, and considering the close resemblance it bears to many other ancient portraits of this epoch, there can be no reason for doubting that it is an authentic portrait. This picture is worked in gold on a dark blue ground.

CHAPTER III.

PORTRAITS FROM THE CATACOMBS.—FRESCOS.



THE foregoing instances of portraits in gold on glass pateræ, illustrate the gradation or development of the especial characteristics of the Likeness of our Lord, from that early period of the Church in Italy when, owing to the absence of authentic information on the subject, the Likeness was represented under the conventional type or character of a Roman youth, till through successive phases, each more advanced than the preceding, it attained to a fair resemblance (making allowance for minuteness of scale and rudeness of workmanship) of the Likeness, as now recognized.

It will be shown further on that there is every reason to believe that there existed in the East, from the earliest period of our era, portraits from which these were probably copied ; but this question can hardly be entered upon till it is established that these pictures on glass pateræ may be, with something approaching certainty, referred to the first age of the Church.

Fortunately, the question of the antiquity of works of Art found in the Roman catacombs is beset with comparatively few difficulties. Closed as these cemeteries have been for centuries to all access, and their very existence forgotten, their contents have escaped alike the corrosive effects of light and air, alteration by the restorer, and dispersion by the collector. And having been given to the world at an age when the acuteness of criticism rendered it impossible to invest them with a fictitious or legendary history, they have been shielded from influences that have operated to deteriorate the value and to cast strong doubt on the antiquity of numberless other works not so protected.

The range of time during which works of Art could have been placed in the catacombs is necessarily limited. There is historic evidence that the cemeteries were closed during the pontificate of Damasus the First. It therefore follows that, even if we allow the origin of the Church in Italy to date from a period closely following the resurrection of our Lord, a few years more than three centuries will comprise the extreme period during which they could have been placed there. It is probable, however, that this time should be much more circumscribed, as, in the nature of things, it is hardly possible that cemeteries could have been required for interments on any extensive scale, or that particular fashions in the decoration of sepulchres could have been established, till the Church had existed for some years. Again, it is scarcely

likely that subterranean cemeteries would have been resorted to, or the sepulchres embellished on any extensive scale, after the conversion of the Empire, when public attention would rather have been engrossed by the erection and adornment of the sacred buildings above ground. But admitting that the period of three centuries would apply to the general mass of works of Art in the catacombs—with respect to the glass pictures this time must be still further curtailed. Tertullian, who wrote about the year 160, makes mention of the portraits of our Lord as the Good Shepherd on the glass sacramental vessels of the “*first Christians*,” alluding to a practice of a time gone by. Eusebius also, writing about the year 330, mentions the portraits of our Saviour and the Apostles on the sacramental vessels of the primitive Church, and states that the use of these glass chalices was discontinued owing to an edict of the Church, introducing those of metal in their place. That the cups from which the pictures in question were taken were such sacramental vessels is sufficiently attested by the inscriptions they bear, the signification of their decorations, and the uses to which we find them applied.

It has been held that the practice of burying with vessels containing wine was but the continuance of the pagan use of pateræ under similar circumstances; but the objection, even were it sustained, would only still further strengthen the conclusion that they were the sacred vessels of the Church. The pagans did indeed bury their dead with pateræ. But what was a patera, but a sacrificial cup, containing a portion of the blood of a sacrificed victim? Christianize the idea, and it would be difficult to conceive of any practice that would at once so completely enter into and combine with every sentiment of the new Faith, and at the same time so perfectly illustrate its creed. Human affection adheres with peculiar tenacity to every received mode of expressing itself on the occasion of the final parting; and to the Christian converts, who, in the freshness of their new-born faith, saw but the fructification of a certain hope in that event which they had hitherto regarded as its extinction, the blood of the pagan victim would inevitably suggest that life-giving blood of the “*Lamb slain from the foundation of the world*,” whereby they had “*boldness to enter into the holiest, by the new and living way which He had consecrated for them*,” and this passport to the heavenly kingdom would present itself to them as the peculiarly fitting accompaniment to the traveller bound to its shores.

Taking into consideration the testimonies of Tertullian and Eusebius, instanced above, and in the absence of any reason being urged to the contrary, we can scarcely err in ascribing these productions to the years ranging between the first establishment of the Church and a period antecedent to the birth of Tertullian, or between the years 60 and 120.¹

The time within which we must look for the dates of these works being thus limited, the inquiry as to their *respective* antiquity presents but few difficulties, and

¹ Instances of portraits on glass have indeed been found which must be ascribed to a period later than that of Tertullian, but they have invariably been representations of the persons buried in the graves whence they were taken.

the question is rendered still easier of elucidation by the nature of the uses to which they were devoted. Were we to find a number of such objects in a subterranean temple there would exist no *prima facie* reason for concluding that they were not all of them of contemporaneous origin. But with objects which have been deposited in a series of interments the case is very different. Evidence which would be of little weight if these works had been simultaneously deposited, becomes greatly increased in significance in deciding on their respective antiquity when it is certain that they must of necessity have belonged to different periods.

Amongst the evidences that more especially indicate the relative antiquity of the objects in question are—the places in the catacombs whence they were taken, whether nearer to or farther from the part first excavated—the orthography, particularly that of proper names of Greek or Hebrew origin before they had been in circulation a sufficient time to have acquired an authentic form of spelling—the style of dress—the style of workmanship—and especially the nature of the symbols accompanying the figures. All the evidences indicated under these heads would lead us to infer a priority of date to the ruder of the Likenesses rather than to the more perfect. It is not now a question of the higher order of expression, or of the exact form of feature, but of such leading traits of character as we could expect to find in diminutive representations, executed by unskilled workmen in a new material. And in those instances in which the fact can be ascertained, it is found that the works in which the Likeness is most conventionally represented, or rather in which it is wholly absent, came from a part of the catacombs which must (from their mode of excavation) have been the first used. As a case in point, the outline (page 20) of the Raising of Lazarus, was taken from a grave near the entrance to the Cemetery of S. Sebastian. It will be apparent at a glance that in the countenance a mere conventional type of character has been all that the artist attempted. The orthography of the name is different from that which it afterwards assumed; and while no symbol whatever is used to indicate the principal figure, Lazarus is distinguished by a nimbus. The omission of what soon afterwards became so express a sign of the Divine Person, and its transference to a mortal, can only be explained by the supposition that the use or the meaning of the symbol was as yet undefined. Probably it was accorded to the dead, but not to the living; and as it is certain that it was in use amongst the pagans as a decoration to the statues of their deities, it might not, amongst the first Christians, have been held as exclusively applicable to a Divine Person. From the barbarous form of the inscription, and from the style of dress, it would appear that the representation of our Lord conferring the Crown on S. Peter and S. Paul (page 24), would belong to a period slightly subsequent to the picture of the Raising of Lazarus. Accordingly, with the important exception of the nimbus, we find no symbol to distinguish the principal figure, and the type of countenance which it exhibits, though an advance from the mere conventional form of the preceding, is still deficient in the leading characteristic of the flowing hair. In the picture of our Lord conferring the Crown on S. Timothy and S. Justus (page 25), the costume is distinctly of the time of Traian. The two persons represented must

have been in the middle period of life in the year 58 or 60; it is, therefore, probable that they died before the end of the century, and from the fact of their having, as far as can be learnt, occupied no very prominent position in the Church of Italy, it is, as we have said, improbable that representations of them would have been executed long after their decease. These considerations would lead to the conclusion that this work must be referred to the close of the first century, in which belief we are strengthened by the fact of its having been taken from a more advanced position in the cemetery than those previously mentioned.

That in the works under consideration, a close approach to a received or authenticated form of likeness was required of the artist, is evident from comparing the annexed illustration with the different portraits of the same persons on pages 24 and 27. In the upper portion the portrait of S. John, with the beardless face and



hair divided in the middle, so far agrees with the representation of the same Apostle in the sketch of our Lord and Judas, and in these respects conforms with the received tradition. The portraits of S. Peter and S. Paul are sufficiently obvious. The fourth figure in the same picture, indicated by the name Damas, was probably a person of the name of Damasus, who filled an important position in the Church towards the end of the first century.

On looking at these pictures, the strong portrait-like individuality of each is at once apparent; this will be evident by comparing them with the conventional representations of our Lord where no likeness is attempted—as in the Raising of Lazarus. This decided and recognizable distinctiveness existing in the many portraits of the Apostles found in the catacombs, with only such slight deviations as might be expected to result from the different materials in which they were

executed, is strong evidence that a close adherence to some authenticated type was required at the time. Consequently, when we see associated with these portraits of the Apostles, others of our Lord, also marked by a strong and consentaneous individuality, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that *they also* were in close adherence to a recognized and authenticated type or character. In the same chapel in the catacombs, and forming part of the same series of decorative illustrations with the portraits of SS. Peter and Paul, is a fresco of our Lord (see the engraving on this page). That it is amongst the oldest of the works in the cemetery is evidenced by the fact of the picture of which it forms part having been cut through to admit of



the interment of a person near the remains of the martyr buried beneath (to whom the chapel was dedicated). This aperture, marked by the quadrangular piece of shading, renders it difficult to form an opinion as to the subject represented, but in the head of our Lord the leading characteristics are clear and unmistakable, and it would be difficult to urge any reason why it is not worthy of the same acceptance as the portraits with which it is associated. Its great antiquity, besides being proved by its partial destruction to admit of an interment (at latest in the beginning of the third century—probably at the beginning of the second), is further evidenced by the absence of any symbol to distinguish the Divine person.

Whatever period may be assigned to the first use of symbols, the adoption of those borrowed from the imagery of the Apocalypse would seem to indicate a time when some precise information reached the Church as to the true Likeness of our Lord, since we find that they are almost invariably accompanied by an attempt, more or less successful, to render it according to the received form; whereas in the vast majority of works in which they are absent the portrait is a merely conventional one, and without any approach to individuality. The question immediately suggests itself, Were these symbols taken from the Apocalypse? or were they part of a received system of symbolic representation previously existing in the Church?

This last supposition would, of course, infer that the imagery of the Revelation must have been derived from ideas already generally diffused through the Christian



FROM EXCAVATION UNDER THE
CHURCH OF ST MARIA IN TRASTEVERE.

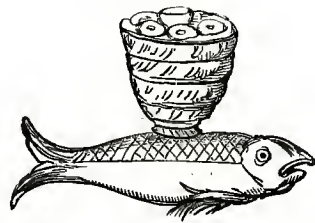
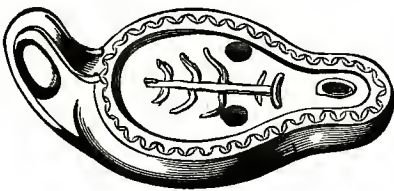
communities. But as we can scarcely admit of this, we are forced to the conclusion that the symbols of the pictures were derived from the sacred writings. And as it will be shown presently that there is historic evidence that portraits of our Lord (one at least of which can still be identified) must have existed in Asia Minor at a period close upon the time when the author of the Revelation was still living, it would seem not improbable that with these writings there came to the Church in Italy that information respecting the Divine resemblance that guided the artists in their subsequent efforts.

Leading directly to this inference, is the extreme rarity—I believe I might say the utter absence—amongst the numberless pictures and other works of Art in the catacombs, of the representation of any subject not directly taken from the Gospel or other writings of the Apostle John. This circumstance can only be accounted for on the supposition that the three first Gospels, as well as the Acts of the Apostles, were still unknown to the Church at Rome; otherwise, it is difficult to supply a reason for the omission of numerous subjects that may not only be considered as amongst the most important in the Gospel narratives, but such as it may be supposed would more especially have entered into the sentiments and forms of thought of a militant and suffering Church. The subjects of the Change of the Water into Wine, the Conversation with the Samaritan Woman, and the Raising of Lazarus, being peculiar to S. John's Gospel, are frequently met with in the catacombs; and some of his allegories, such as the Good Shepherd, or the Vine and the Branches, are repeated continually, and in every possible form; while in no instance, so far as I could ascertain, is the Nativity, the Transfiguration, the Raising of the Daughter of Jairus, or the Ascension of our Lord, to be met with, these being amongst the more important of the subjects common to the three first Evangelists, but omitted by the last. That the Apostle made no mention in his narrative of scenes, all of which are of striking, and two of them of stupendous significance, and to all but one of which he must have been a principal witness, is accounted for on the supposition of his having designed his Gospel as an appendix to the others, and to compensate for their omissions. But this exclusive illustration of the writings of S. John would point to the conclusion that, though his works were later in date than those of the other sacred writers, they were earlier known to the Church in Italy. As it is beyond dispute, however, that the whole of the Gospels were well known in Rome in the time of Tertullian (the latter part of the second century), we cannot but infer that the greater part of the decorations of the catacombs were executed before the period in which he wrote. In further support of this view, we find portraits in repeated instances of such of the Apostles and their coadjutors as exercised a direct influence on the teaching of the Christian communities of Italy. S. Peter and S. Paul are continually to be met with; also Timothy and Justus, both of whom were for some time resident in the locality, and associated with S. Paul in his ministry. With the other Apostles we also find S. John (see page 31), but, excepting as mere conventional figures to make up the number of the Twelve, in no instance do we find a portrait of any other of the New Testament writers. This

introduction of the portrait of S. John would seem to include him amongst the number of the special instructors of that Church, though he had not actually visited it. Had it been the case that the three first Evangelists were at this period known by their writings, we should certainly expect to find representations of them, if not so numerous as of the others, yet not altogether absent. Whatever may have occasioned this exclusive illustration of the writings of S. John, there can be no question of the strong influence exercised upon the Art of the early Italian Church by the peculiarly spiritual tone of philosophy and feeling of that Apostle. While the other Evangelists are more occupied with the actions and parables, the last initiates us more into the inner mind and mode of thought of the Divine Master.

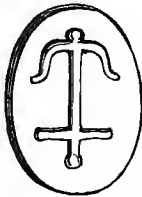
In selecting from the abundance of their materials such parts as might, in their individual opinion, best portray the life and character of their great Teacher, the Evangelists must, unconsciously to themselves, have been actuated in a great measure by their own idiosyncrasies of character. Those scenes and conversations that had most struck them at the time, that had touched most effectively the chords of their own feelings, would not only be impressed most vividly on their memory, but after a lapse of years, would present themselves as being the best exponents of the character of which they were treating. To the more ordinary form of intellect, a miracle—a man raised from the dead—heaven itself opened to their view in the glories of the Transfiguration or of the Ascension—would appeal at once through the sentiments of wonder and admiration; and in the narrative of such an observer, events of this order would necessarily be prominent. It was requisite that the greater number of the Evangelists should have been of this form of intellect, otherwise we might have been left unacquainted with many of the principal events in the Gospel history. S. John, a mind of another order, with a deeper and more spiritual insight into the character of our Lord, felt rather the soul-quickenings influence of the new-taught truths, while others were lost in astonishment at the suspension of nature's laws. On his intellect and memory the celestial transfiguration of his Divine Teacher made less impression than did the words of infinite love and power. While other Apostles remembered but the radiance and the heavenly company, he had no thought but for the words, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life"—"I am the living bread which came down from heaven." While the less spiritual ears of the other Apostles were occupied by the prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem, John was listening to the promise, "My sheep shall never perish, neither shall any one pluck them out of My hand." While in the final interview, immediately preceding the Ascension, they were occupied with the glories amid which their Master ascended to His place, S. John treasures for us only the loving deed of reconciliation, the unsurpassable, unutterable act of tenderness to one who had disowned and deserted Him, "Simon Peter, lovest thou Me? Feed My lambs." And instead of terminating his history by the physical ascension, he gives us the infinitely more appropriate and more impressive last command of his departing Lord, simple as words could express it, but universal and comprehensive in its incidence as the sound of the last angel, "Follow thou me."

The entire writings of the beloved disciple are but the embodiment of his own peculiar and intellectual temperament in so far as it was (notwithstanding its humanity) in strict affinity with the mind of his Divine Teacher; and they are devoted to the inculcation of those higher and more spiritual truths—of which the divinity of the Word, the Light which was from the beginning—the unity with the Father—the certainty of the Resurrection—and the love and unity of the Church, were the principal. Whatever might have been the time or the occasion on which those doctrines found their way to Italy, it is certain that they obtained the most perfect response in the heart of the first Christian community there. Unfortunately, much of the literature of the early Church has been lost to us, but we may see how



deeply the new teaching had struck its roots, by its having been reflected and reproduced in every form which pictorial or plastic art could make available. It entered exclusively and universally into the decorations of the churches, the cemeteries, the jewellery, and even the common household implements of the people. Examples of this will be seen in the sketch of a lamp, on which are represented the seven golden candlesticks or "the seven lamps which are the seven spirits of God;" in the rings with the Alpha and the Omega, and the anchor of the soul; in the fish bearing the bread and water of life; and again, in two beautiful illustrations of the Good Shepherd, the one in which a wolf is represented as attacking the sheep having been evidently suggested by the passage, "My sheep shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand." The allegory in this last is supplemented by the

introduction of the tree of life, and the mystic IXΘΥΣ, the secret symbol for the name of JESUS CHRIST—a sign that appears to have been in use among the members of the Christian community as a means of recognition. It will be observed that in the illustrations mentioned above, our Lord is almost invariably shown as the



protecting Shepherd. In the examples we have yet to consider He is more often represented as the Way, the Truth, and the Life. But as the works in which He is thus typified are for the most part in fresco, we will reserve the examination of them for a separate chapter.

CHAPTER IV.

FRESCOES FROM THE CATACOMBS.



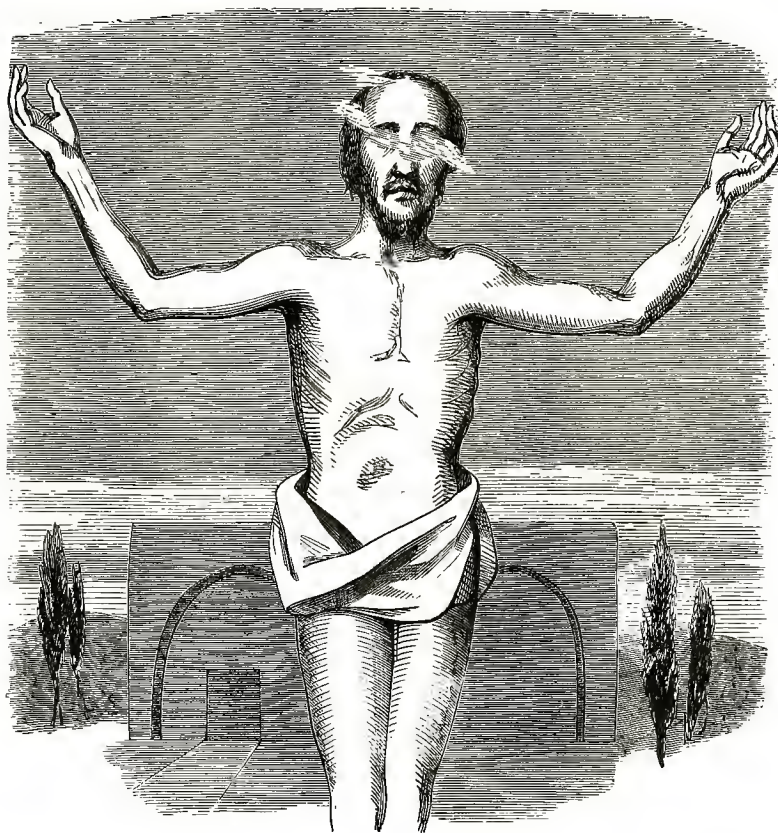
CRITICAL study of the entire mass of works of Art belonging to the catacombs will afford a very clear insight into the forms and development of thought in the primitive Church. The productions of each successive period are characterized respectively by the almost exclusive illustration of some one particular idea in connection with the offices and ministry of our Blessed Lord. This is indeed so marked a feature of these early works of Art that it suggests to us the successive phases of thought that must have been prevalent in the minds of the Christian community. Thus, in the first years of the Church, we find our Lord portrayed chiefly as the Rewarder of the Faithful, bestowing the Crown of Life, instances of which we have seen in the decorations of the pateræ. After this, when the Church was passing through the fiery ordeal of persecution, we find the general, indeed, almost exclusive, representation of the Divine founder in His character of Protector, as the Shepherd of the flock, saving the sheep from the attacks of the enemy, or carrying them across the dark river of death. Then we meet with an equally general representation of our Lord as the Divine Teacher, in the act of giving the Word or of instructing His disciples. And still later we find the special subject of illustration to be Christ in His supreme capacity as the Life-giver, Himself leading the way and opening the door of death by His own resurrection.¹

A beautiful example of this is to be found in a fresco in the catacombs of S. Agnese, an outline of which is given on the next page. It is a work of singular merit, considering the time at which it was executed. A great part of the face is unfortunately obliterated, but enough remains to show not only a likeness of the true type, but an attempt at a high order of expression. Of the attitude it is sufficient to

¹ It is of the extremest importance to note that these successive forms of representation are not so much developments as they are changes in the emphasis of thought, and that they are accumulative rather than transitive. Although each particular period seems to be characterized by some especial choice of subject for illustration, yet at no period do we find the entire absence of any of the great attributes of Christ. Thus, in the earliest relics we see "The Raising of Lazarus," "The Good Shepherd," "The Bringing of the Fruit of the Tree of Life," while the universality of the symbol of the book in the hand of the Divine Teacher is incidentally shown in a passage from Tertullian, who states, in describing a portrait of our Lord executed by a pagan artist, "that though in other respects incorrect and wanting in resemblance, the artist had at least rightly represented Him clothed in a toga, *and with a book in his hand.*"

say that it has been adopted by every generation of artists in delineating the same subject from that time to the present. In the beautiful vision of the Resurrection by Fra Angelico, in the Louvre, the action of the principal figure is an almost exact reproduction of this. Judging from the place this picture was taken from, its attempted obliteration, and the absence of symbol, it would appear to belong to an early period in the second century.

The familiarity engendered by early teaching renders it extremely difficult for us to estimate, at anything like its full force, the commanding influence that the acceptance of the great doctrine of a future life must have exercised on the minds and conceptions of the first believers. An individual to whose imagination the idea had only presented itself through the speculative teaching of a philosophic sect, and



even there had assumed no more tangible or distinct form than that of the dreamy and impalpable existence of the poetical Hades, must have received the first revelation of immortality—the first firm conviction of the indestructibility of his being (demonstrated as it was by the actual and visible resurrection of the great teacher of the new creed)—with the extatic wonder of an entirely new mental development. We who, from our first ideas having been associated with the belief, receive it almost as a matter of course, can never fully realize the impressions of one who, having lived in the soul-benumbing darkness of a futurity of annihilation, was

suddenly illumined with the inspired conviction of the life to come. To such an one that life was not another—it already had begun. He had entered upon the new existence, and, in the full assurance of his faith, he felt his immortality to have commenced when he awoke to the consciousness of its reality.

As a consequence of the very strength and completeness of the new intuition, it was inevitable that in the mode of its reception there should be some preponderating influence of the letter rather than the spirit. To the oppressed bondsman, the pains of this present state would seem as nothing compared to the glory in which he was shortly to be a participator. Starving, and in misery, he, the poor degraded slave, crushed, despised, the very offcast of humanity, was shortly—before that generation had passed away—to be the favoured guest at the marriage table of his heavenly Master. Abject and scorned as he now was, a “dweller, perhaps, in the caves and holes of the ground,” he, the specially favoured of his Divine Lord, of whom the world was not worthy, would soon, in shining garments, be a partaker of the ineffable delights of the garden of Paradise. Now a prisoner, reserved perhaps for the barbarous sports of the arena, he was, before the period of an ordinary life had passed away, to be seated on one of the “twelve thrones” of the celestial kingdom, pronouncing the fiat of condemnation on his oppressors, even on Cæsar himself. No mere tacit assent was his, but a sure and certain faith, almost swallowed up in sight, assuring him that already he was on the sacred ground—already an inhabitant of the holy country—and that death itself was not so much the boundary between this life and the next, as the portal to the holiest of holies of that temple, the courts of which he already trod. The advent of such a Revelation as this was an epoch—a fresh starting-point for the human race. We know that seeds which for ages have lain dormant in the depths of the ground will, on being brought into the requisite proximity with light, germinate and fructify. So, a ray of light from another sphere—a new eternal verity, had penetrated the depths of the human mind, and called into existence, or rather into activity, germs of life and action hitherto dormant, but which were destined to grow and fructify in a future of new power and productiveness. “Old things had passed away,” and, with the new revelation, “all things had become new.” The forms of thought, the principles of government, the constitution of society, were to be renovated; and, amidst the general resuscitation, Christian Art was to have its origin. The new intuition was less a faith than a mental development. It was in the fullest sense of the word—a new spiritual growth; and as such it necessitated a new mode of expression. The higher growth of the intellectual organization demanded a language expressive of its higher conceptions, and Christian Art supplied the requirement. Art had indeed existed for ages long past, and, in one branch at least, had attained a perfection that it will probably never see again; but another phase was now opened to it, and as the expression, as well as the exemplar, of the Christian faith, it was to triumph as it had never triumphed before. The Arts of paganism, especially poetry, sculpture, and architecture, were, by their close alliance with idolatry, unfitted for the purer service of the new sanctuary, and must ere they could be admitted to its precincts, pass through the purifying ordeal of

a death and a resurrection. But painting, an Art less identified with pagan worship than the others, presented no such objections, while for symbolizing a Divine truth on a sacramental vessel, on jewellery, or on the walls of a sepulchre, it presented a readier and more expressive mode of representation than either sculpture or poetry could supply. Consequently, in the numerous monuments contained in the Christian cemeteries, we find the plastic arts comparatively rarely exercised, and poetry entirely absent even from the tomb inscriptions; while painting, as an expression of faith, and as a medium of instruction, is seen to have been universally employed.

Again, in the absence of any recognized canon of Scripture, and while the Church, though it had existed for nearly a generation, was still solely dependent on individual teaching for the "faith as delivered to the saints," the necessity arose for some mode of keeping the leading doctrines of the Church more continually before the Christian community, especially the younger portion of it, than mere oral instruction could possibly do. For this purpose, no means so readily presented itself as that Art which had already been extensively adopted in the decoration of the sacred vessels, and for symbolizing on the graves of the departed the one eternal hope—and that had in fact been already recognized as the adopted language of the Church; a function in which Christian Art unquestionably had its origin, and which was destined afterwards to lead to its noblest developments. And in an age, and amongst a grade of society, wherein written language was intelligible only to the few, the great events of the sacred narratives could hardly have been impressed on the memory of the neophyte by any other means. Accordingly we see in the various chapels of the catacombs the series of pictures (to which allusion has been made before) continually repeated, expressing in a regular and developing progression those doctrines that more especially distinguish the Christian creed—the one God, the fall of our race, its renovation in the Saviour, and especially the great destiny awaiting it. But in impressing painting into its service, Christianity found it but rude and imperfect to its hand. As far as any precise record has come down to us, it had hitherto (amongst the Romans at least) been exercised only as the craft of the house decorator, and not having entered into the sympathies or affections of the popular mind, it had remained shackled and depressed by the uncongenial functions to which it was confined, owing whatever merit it possessed to the influence of contemporaneous sculpture, and partaking also of its puerile conventionalisms. So, in its first use by the Church, we find it characterized by this imperfect and dwarfed development; having hitherto ministered but to pride and luxury, it still retained the brand of its slavery. But it was now called upon to fulfil the ennobling vocation of expressing the great heart and sympathies of the people, and to be the chosen exponent and illustrator of those stupendous verities by the force of which the fabric of existing society was already being powdered into dust, as the inevitable condition of its reconstruction on principles and bases entirely new. An exotic in the courts of the Cæsars, the minister to luxury and ostentation, painting had dwindled and declined. Transplanted by the hand of religion to the school of the little child, to the grave of the despised and persecuted slave—in lowliness and meekness to teach,



FROM THE CATACOMBS OF ST AGNESE.

to comfort—humbly bending its head to pass through the low portal to the straight and narrow way—naturally, but not the less divinely inspired, we see it afterwards ennobled as the mouthpiece, as the very voice, of the Church, and, as such, that also of the Church's Divine Head. Under such conditions, it was impossible but that painting should rise to the performance of its new functions; and we find it accordingly expanding and developing in proportion to the elevation of its new vocation.

I do not, of course, mean to imply that painting had its origin contemporaneously with Christianity; we have ample records of its existence from a far higher antiquity. The fame of certain Greek artists is familiar to all; but the degree of excellence attained in their works is merely conjectural, while such of the antique paintings as



have come down to us in the decorations of Assyrian, Egyptian, and Roman edifices, are but the efforts of an art undeveloped, and yet in its infancy. It was certainly not till the second age of the Church, and then only in such works as were essentially Christian, that we find painting to have proceeded upon principles of composition, expression, and arrangement peculiar to itself, and which established and sustained its claim to be a distinct art from that of sculpture, and led to its astonishing and unique development in the mosaics of the fifth century.¹

The outline on this page is from an almost defaced work of probably the end of

¹ It may be contended that the celebrated work known as the "Nozze Aldobrandine" is an instance to the contrary; but it is not probable that that work dates from before the third century, and even if it did, its entire treatment, with the exception of a subdued and inoffensive scale of colouring, is entirely sculptural and decorative—so much so, indeed, as to suggest its being a transcript from a bas-relief.

the first century, or, at all events, of that early period when there was no recognized type of our Saviour's Likeness. It is a representation of the parable of the wise and the foolish virgins, and will show that painting had already begun to proceed upon a system of its own, and to separate itself from the trammels of sculpture. The subject, instead of partaking of the cramped conventionality of the pagan period, is well laid out—somewhat stiff and formal, it is true, as Christian Art was as yet making its first efforts only,—but still manifesting that a firm and decided step had been planted in the direction it afterwards continued to take.

The next sketch is from a nearly obliterated representation of our Lord giving the Word to His disciples, and though belonging, like the former, to that early period

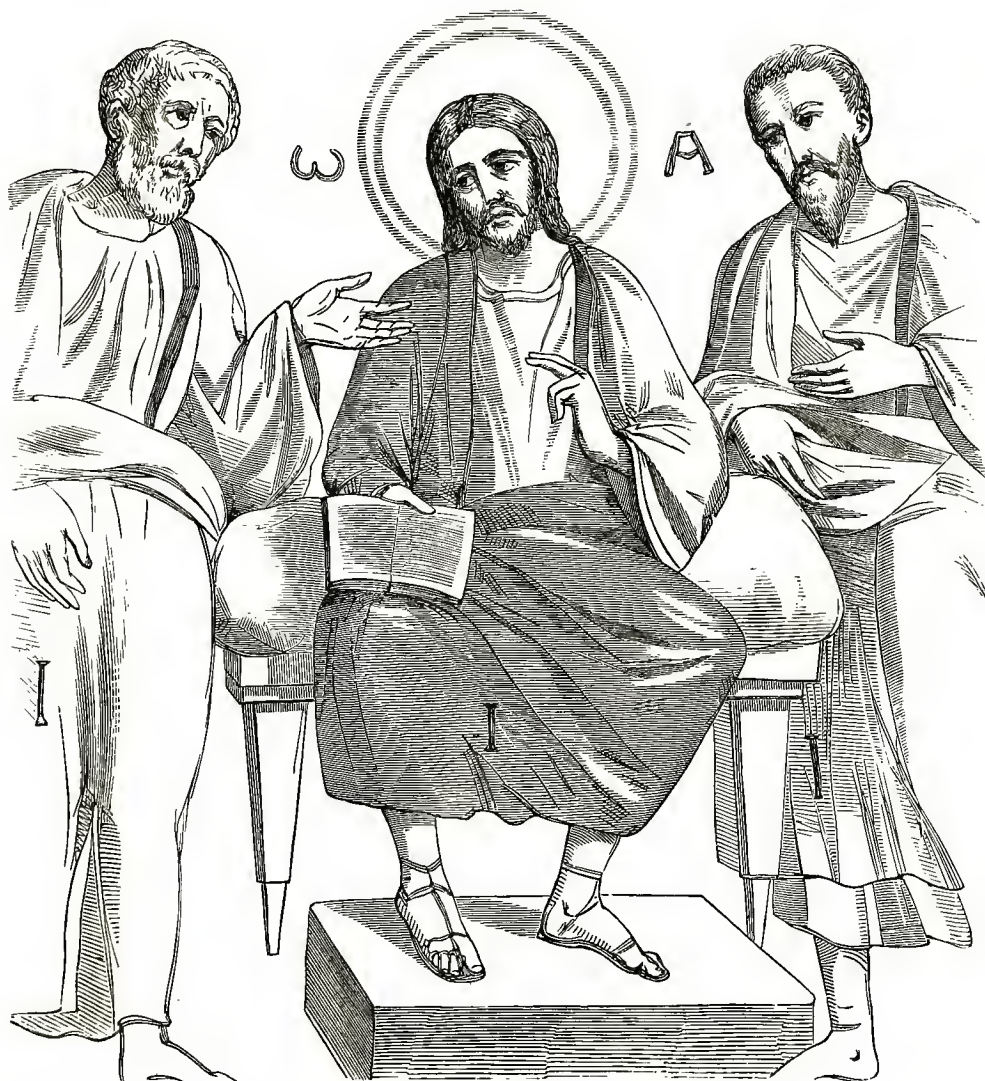


when the true Likeness was unknown in the Italian Church, we see in it the principles of composition and arrangement which have ever since prevailed in the Art. The attitude of the principal figure is colloquial and appropriate, while the disciples are naturally and effectively grouped. The attitudes, though somewhat stiff, are by no means incorrect; and the whole work is decidedly *picturesque* as opposed to *sculpturesque* in its treatment. This fresco is now in the lower tier of the cemetery of SS. Achilli e Nereo.

On the opposite page is another representation of the same subject, our Lord as the Fountain-head of Inspiration. It shows again a decided advance,¹ and in it the

¹ The balanced and sculpturesque effect is not so apparent in the original fresco (of which this outline is only a portion), where the whole of the Twelve Apostles are represented.

true type of Likeness is decidedly and unmistakably rendered, as well in the principal figure as in those of the two apostles, S. Peter and S. Paul. The conception and treatment of the whole are just and natural, though still somewhat stiff and formal ; and the delicacy and finish of the heads, as well as the beautiful arrangement of colour in the original, establish it as a distinct advance from what had preceded it. This work (which is to be referred to the end of the second century or to the



The Fountain-head of Inspiration

beginning of the third) is in the cemetery of Pretextati, and a good copy of it may be seen in the museum of the Lateran. Under the central figure is a representation of the Lamb on the throne of God, from beneath which issues the River of the Water of Life, showing, with the symbols of the Alpha and the Omega, the distinct reference the picture bears to the passage in S. John's Apocalypse.

The illustration on page 44 is an exceedingly beautiful one, representing the

scene at the Last Supper between our Lord and Judas : " He that dippeth his hand with me in the dish, the same shall betray me." The original picture comprises also the whole number of the Apostles ; but, with the exception of Judas and S. John, they are omitted here, as not bearing directly on the subject. The inferior figures, as well as the accessories in this work, are indifferently, and in parts carelessly rendered ; so much so, indeed, that it seems as if the artist had purposely executed them so, to direct the more attention to the countenance and expression of our Lord, which are true and beautiful to a degree rarely to be met with in these early works. The scale of the original is small, not allowing of the heads being above an inch and a half in length ; but as far as could be rendered in fresco, and in such small size, the



Likeness is of exceeding and precious beauty. The long waving hair, parted in the middle of the wide intellectual forehead, the straight nose, the pointed beard, and the delicate and spiritual cast of countenance and expression, are exactly what succeeding artists have attempted to reproduce ; and, with a daring astonishing in so early an artist, the mouth is properly represented well opened—as addressing the words quoted above to Judas—without, however, in consequence, losing any of its expression. This work was taken from the catacombs, and is now in the reserved department of the Vatican, attached to the Bibliotheca ; but from the position it once occupied, the style of the execution, and the absence of symbol, it would appear to belong to about the middle or the third quarter of the second century.

This picture, and the next, a medallion portrait, may be instanced as specimens

of the best period of the art of fresco painting in the Church of the first three centuries. Various causes operated after this period to retard for a time its further advance. Mosaic work offered a richer effect and a style more adapted for architectural embellishment; from about the middle of the third century it seems to have occupied the principal attention of the Christian artists. About this period, also, a change took place in the fashion of representing sacred subjects that had a decided effect on the excellence of their execution. Instead of being represented in the plain and natural manner we have hitherto seen, they were depicted with their real signification veiled under various forms borrowed from the heathen mythology. Thus, Orpheus and the Beasts will be found in the place of our Lord and the Apostles, and various other pagan myths intended to convey a concealed representation of the scriptural subjects most in vogue in the Art of the Church. Different reasons have been assigned for this change: amongst others, the prevalence at this time of Gnostic doctrines in the Church, whereby ideas borrowed from the Platonic philosophy were engrafted on the simpler tenets of the early faith. I have never yet been able to trace this opinion to any better foundation than mere conjecture, and I only give it because it is the one generally received. But there is distinct evidence to show that, at this period, grave doubts began to be entertained in the Christian community of the propriety of making any representation of the Divine Person—doubts which by the end of the third century had become so established, that Eusebius, on being requested by a lady to procure for her a portrait of our Lord, refused to do so, on the ground of the great impiety of the proceeding, expressing his horror at the bare idea of making any representation of the Supreme Being. To the same cause may probably be referred the (evidently intentional) obliteration of many of the pictures in the catacombs, the animus being evidenced by the head only of the sacred Likeness being defaced. Possibly this destruction may not be the work solely of Christian iconoclasts. Christianity was, at this time, ridiculed in the profane literature of the day, and its most holy things blasphemously caricatured by the pagan multitude (a singular instance of this profanity has been already given), and the use of a mythical representation of sacred subjects might not improbably have been adopted, in order to avoid the outrages to which such works were exposed from the pagan populace when executed under the usual form. Whether from the same consideration the Church withheld its sanction from mural decorations or not is uncertain; but there can be no question that a decline did take place, from about this period, in both the number and the excellence of such works.

From the instances already given of the Likeness of our Lord, it will be seen that where anything beyond a mere conventional, expressionless countenance was attempted, the portrait invariably conformed to one consentaneous type. And on the decline of fresco-painting, towards the fourth century, this traditional Likeness had become so fixed in the minds of the Christian artists, that the portraits of this period became characterized by an exaggeration of the peculiar traits of feature, and a want of feeling in the general treatment, that invariably mark works executed by rote, and without exertion of thought or invention. But this very exaggeration or

tendency to caricature affords the strongest internal evidence of the express and precise form in which the tradition of the Likeness had reached the artist.

The beautiful medallion Likeness, of which an engraving is given on this page, is from the chapel in the cemetery of S. Calisto, and dates, in all probability, from the beginning or middle of the second century, as it is associated and apparently contemporaneous with others in the same chamber that are unquestionably amongst the oldest works in the catacombs. It is life-size ; the Likeness is truly and feelingly rendered, and the expression elevated and intellectual. Unfortunately, the smoke from the tapers of visitors, and the damp from the rock, have so operated to obscure it that the tints of colour, beyond mere light and shadow, are indistinguishable.

Compare this picture, in which no kind of symbol, not even the nimbus, is



106-150

used, with the more recent one given on p. 47, which is overladen with symbolic imagery, just in proportion as it is deficient in execution and treatment. It is the well-known life-size portrait from the tomb of S. Cecilia, and as that saint was martyred towards the end of the fourth century, it is improbable that it was executed very long after that date. It is a striking example of the exaggeration or caricature of the true type to which I have referred. The hard, strong, and rude delineation, with the excess of ornament, all mark the decline of Art ; but it is interesting to observe that there is not one trait of feature, however coarsely rendered, but what is to be found in the earlier work with which, for the purpose of comparison, it is associated here. In the same style, and nearly contemporaneous with this last, is

the portrait of the blessed Virgin, given below. From the broad face, black hair, coarsely-marked eyebrows, and large black eyes, it will be seen that it differs in every respect from the type that afterwards prevailed; and shows clearly that at a



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time when the portraits of our Lord, and at least three of the Apostles, were executed according to a received and fixed tradition of Likeness, there existed in the Italian Church no such record of that of the blessed Virgin.

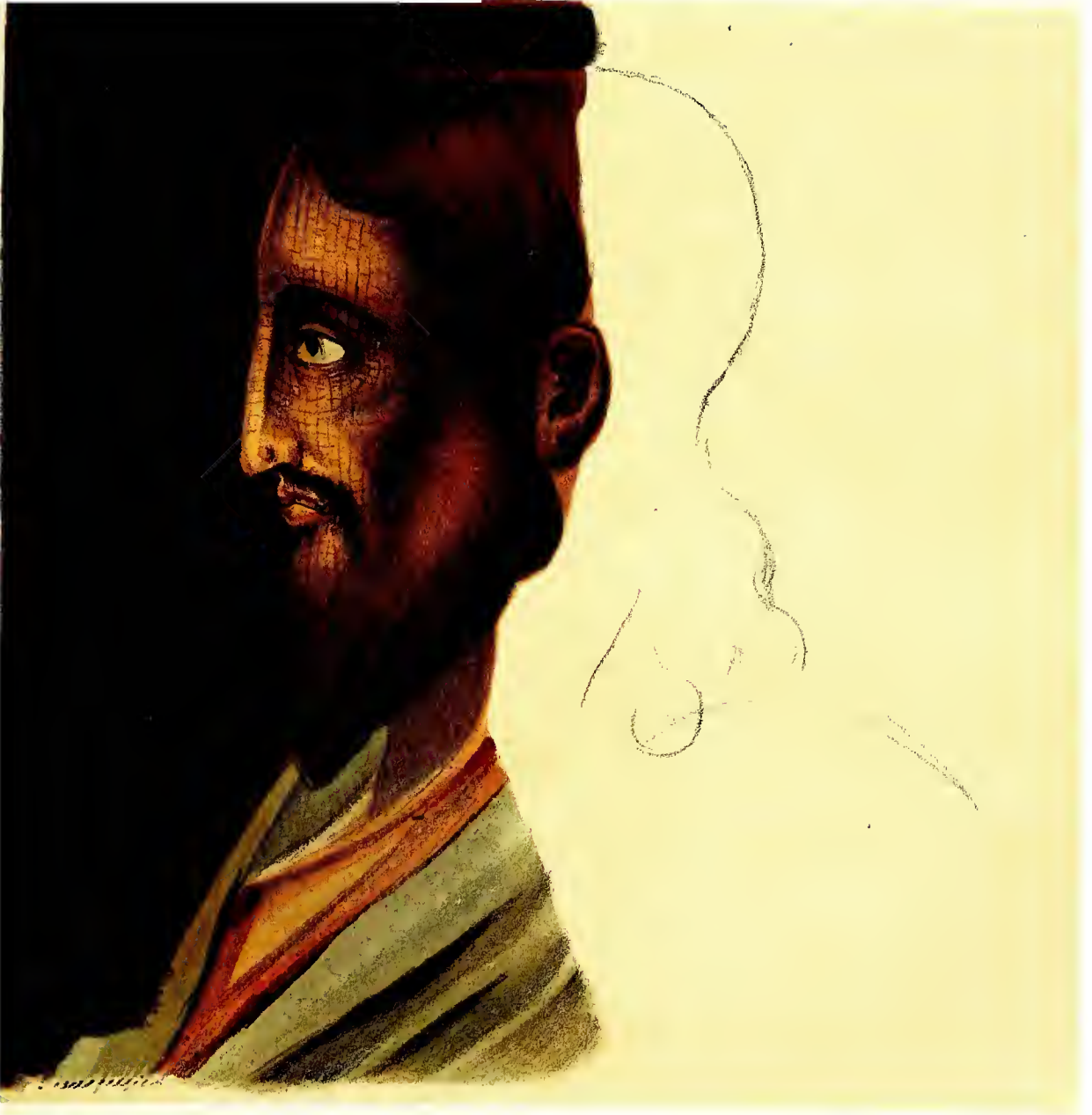
CHAPTER V.

EARLY GREEK WORKS.

WITH the instances of the Likeness of our Lord contained in the last chapter concludes the series of illustrations taken from the Christian cemeteries. From the absence of any intermixture of legend or fable with their history, the indications they afford of the antiquity of the traditional Likeness are far more conclusive and satisfactory than that supplied by any other class of works. We have seen this Likeness traced in repeated instances on glass vessels buried in the graves of the first generation of the Christian community in Italy, rudely executed, it is true, but still presenting the well-known and unmistakable characteristics that have descended to after ages. We have next seen it represented more or less correctly in the numerous mural decorations of the subterranean chapels, in the catacombs, and especially in those works where the subject represented has direct reference to the writings of the Apostle John. We find the same Likeness adhered to in the third and fourth centuries, when, from reasons still open to doubt, the events of the Gospel history and the doctrines of the Church were symbolized either under the form of Old Testament allegories or of pagan myths. And towards the fifth century, when the tradition became fixed, we see it represented with all the hardness and exaggeration incidental to works executed according to a received pattern, and without mental effort on the part of the artist. It must be admitted, however, that the works in which we see these unmistakable indications of the Likeness are associated with a number of others (perhaps a majority) in which they are either entirely absent, or present but partial traits of resemblance. But as, where there is any departure from the mere conventional drawing of a head, it is in every case in the direction of the one received tradition, the inference is very strong indeed that up to a certain period (probably the end of the fourth century), while there were painters who, either from ignorance or carelessness, were content to produce a mere negative representation, there were others who worked in accordance with certain specified information.

Various circumstances point to the conclusion that this tradition of the Divine Likeness came to the Italian Church directly from the East. From the absence of any instances of enamelling in glass to be found in Italy during the first four centuries, excepting in sacramental vessels buried with the first Christians, and

PLATE VIII.



FROM A MOSAIC TAKEN FROM THE ROMAN CATACOMBS.

taking into consideration the great development that this art obtained soon after in Byzantium and Asia Minor, it is hardly forcing a conclusion to infer the probability of the Eastern origin of such productions. Again, in the works that refer directly to the writings of S. John, and which, there is reason to believe, were executed soon after the reception of his writings from Asia Minor, we see such a decidedly pronounced accession of strength and character in the delineation of the Likeness, that the question suggests itself whether, with the writings of the Apostle, there did not come some additional information respecting the Divine resemblance. To ascertain this fact more conclusively, it will be necessary to consider the claims to authenticity of a large number of pictures existing in Italy and elsewhere, claiming to be executed either by one of the Evangelists, or at least to be contemporary with the Apostolic age.

At the very outset of this inquiry, however, obstacles present themselves of a nature to render any investigation at all a task of no ordinary difficulty. A picture is shown to you, unquestionably of great age, the history of which, could it be ascertained, would doubtless be most interesting; but the account given of it is so interwoven with the marvellous, and so combined with fable and legend, that any grains of truth that may exist in the accumulation of rubbish, baffle all attempts at identification. Pictures of the class now alluded to generally form the altar-piece to some chapel, set apart from the others in the same edifice on account of its peculiar sanctity. The altar-piece is kept (excepting on certain saints' days) covered with a curtain, and the picture itself, excepting the head and what amount of figure it may contain, is enclosed in a silver or gold mounting. The painting is rudely executed, always on panel and in *tempera*; it has become very dark and obscured by time, is of unquestionable antiquity, and in every instance a long list of wonders is related in connection with it, the least of which is that it was painted by S. Luke from our Lord himself. The fact is only not physically impossible. That S. Luke painted is neither contrary to common sense nor to probability; works have in all ages been attributed to him, and Eusebius repeats the tradition to that effect. There is no necessity to suppose that our Lord himself gave sittings to the artist, we reject the idea instinctively, not without something like offence at the bare mention of it, but there is no irreverence in the conjecture that such likenesses may have been painted not in His presence.

Again, with respect to another class of works, excepting in those instances in which the picture is too sacred for lay inspection, we are taken by a functionary into a sacristy; after some ceremonial the door of a reliquary is opened, and we are shown various objects calculated to astonish the hard logical mind of an Anglo-Saxon, in more senses than one. To some of these things it would, to our northern minds, border on the profane even to allude; but we may instance a portion of Aaron's almond rod that budded, some teeth that once belonged to certain fishermen who lived eighteen hundred years ago, and parts of the clothing of a holy and blessed woman of the same period. An exact and inductive mind, after having given the requisite attention to these things, is scarcely in a state to appreciate at its proper

value the next object shown—a stained and tattered rag, covered with holes and discolorations, which while they present the appearance of having been caused by fire, are in reality the corroding effects of time. So ragged and decayed is this cloth, that it would fall to pieces if it were not held together by a board behind. Amidst the tatters and discolorations may be discerned a life-size portrait of our Lord. In those passages in which it is not too obscured, the countenance will be found to be executed with singular power. The hand of the painter may have been facile or the reverse, and the portrait may be free or cramped in execution, but the peculiar depth and refinement of the expression, and the feeling with which every feature is depicted, bespeak the thought exercised by the artist, and his sympathy with his work. Of the entire contents of the reliquary this picture is probably the only genuine one. We may demur to the precise circumstances related of its origin, but its antiquity is in all likelihood as great as it purports to be. The linen on which it is executed will be found to be identical in manufacture with that taken from the graves of the first Christians. No portraits but that of our Lord (not even that of the blessed Virgin) are ever found represented in this manner. The frame or shrine in which the picture has been set, and which has been made to fit closely round the head, is generally of early Byzantine work; and in most instances the picture can be proved, on credible historic evidence, to have existed in the time of Constantine, or early in the fourth century, and at that time to have been reputed as the work of the first century. So far the account is credible, and were it to stop here we should be satisfied with it, and consider the work to be a relic of so high an antiquity as to present unusual claims on our attention. But we are denied this satisfaction. After a long detail of the miracles performed by the mere presence of the picture, we are informed that the cloth on which it is depicted was the handkerchief of S. Veronica, who, it would seem, formed one of the dread procession to Calvary, and on this handkerchief, we are told, the Divine image became impressed by its being applied directly to the face of our Lord on that occasion.

Now, while it is necessary, for argument's sake, to reject everything incapable of conforming to the stringent requirements of historic proof, there exists no reason for excluding the mention of many traditions that are related in connection with these works. While there may be no satisfactory evidence in support of such traditions, yet they are so much in accordance with our experience of human nature, and bear so much the impress and *ensemble* of facts of every-day life, that we are led to suspect there may be a considerable amount of truth at the foundation of them.

S. Paul, writing to Timothy from Rome, while he was a strict prisoner, says: "Eubulus greeteth thee, and Pudens, and Linus, and Claudia." Of the four persons here named, two of them are known to us from other sources. Linus is counted the first or the second bishop of Rome, according as S. Peter is reckoned or otherwise. Pudens was a Roman senator of high rank, early converted to Christianity with his two daughters. Parts of the house he inhabited are still shown, built into the walls and flooring of a church in Rome, dedicated to S. Pudenziana, one of his daughters. From various reliable accounts that have come down to us it would appear that

Pudens and his daughters were zealous and active in their religion; and as they were wealthy and hospitable, it could hardly be but that S. Paul and his coadjutors would be welcome guests at the house of this Christian family. The legend tells us that both S. Peter and S. Paul were frequent visitors there, and the assertion is borne out by the circumstance of the greeting in the Epistle to Timothy, which, as it was sent four or five years after Timothy was staying in Rome, evidences the intimacy that had previously existed. The legend goes on to relate that one evening, when the two sisters were seated at table with S. Peter, one of them (S. Praxedes) asked the Apostle, "What the Lord was like?" when he took up her handkerchief, and with the pen (or *stylus*) traced the resemblance on the piece of linen. A faded and scarcely discernible picture, purporting to be this drawing, is preserved in the sacristy of the church of S. Praxedes. Satisfactory evidence assures us that it was there, and with the same history attached to it, when the mother of Constantine built the church out of the materials that had previously formed the house of Pudens. Some countenance is given to the story from the drawing being small in size, and in other respects distinctly different from any other work of the same class. The framework in which it is encased, and which fits close to the head and shoulders, is of the most ancient Byzantine enamel, and the linen is of the same peculiar manufacture that was used in the first centuries. I instance this story as one of many that, while they prove nothing, are yet so replete with the simplicity of truth that we can hardly refrain from according to them some degree of credence; though with regard to any use that can be made of it in an inquiry of this nature, it differs in no degree from the most improbable legend. The ascertained date of this picture, reaching back as it does to beyond the time of Constantine, would have entitled it to a place amongst these illustrations. But the original is so faded and obscured that it is impossible to reproduce it so as to convey a just idea of its character. Enough of the work, however, is visible to show that the shape of the features, the beard, and the hair, are according to the received type.

In the sacristy of S. Peter's, over the gigantic statue of S. Veronica, is a picture accounted so holy that no layman may look upon it—and, I am informed, no churchman save the Pope and his necessary attendants; and even the Holy Father himself only inspects it on one day of the year, immediately after confession and communion. The antiquity of this work is well authenticated, but the accounts of its origin involve the usual difficulties. The picture consists of a life-size head of our Lord, represented as lying during the three days in the sepulchre, or, at all events, at some point of time between the last moment of the crucifixion and the resurrection. The ascertained history of this work reaches back directly to the second century; but, independently of all question of age, it is a production that must stand alone for its extraordinary conception, and the power, indeed, almost inspiration, with which the conception is worked out. Like most others of the same class, it is much obscured, and, in many parts, nearly obliterated by the decay of the cloth on which it is executed. But the very rags and stains, by dimming its execution, and taking away the appearance of the hand of man, seem to add to

its singular impressiveness. The wet, matted hair, the tears, the blood-drops from the crown of thorns, are expressive of the stern reality of death, while the calm, nearly-closed eyes, the gently-parted lips, speak not of corruption, but of the spirit at that moment in Paradise, and of the "shortly to be accomplished" resurrection. So replete is this image with concentrated thought and feeling, that it almost forces on us the conviction that unless he that produced it was, in the fullest sense of the term, inspired, he must have seen that which he depicted. Like other of the greatest triumphs of Art, this effort has been accomplished with the meanest instruments: a piece of cloth, without anything in the shape of preparation, a little transparent pigment, apparently nothing more than a mere stain without colour. Nevertheless, this dimly-figured head, on a tattered rag—for its inspiration, its conception, and its power of execution—is certainly unsurpassed, perhaps hardly equalled, in the whole range of Art. A facsimile of it is given in Plate II.

Second only to this work in excellence, while it is more important, on account of the clear historic evidence that exists to its antiquity, is the picture now preserved in the sacristy of the church of S. Bartolomeo, in Genoa. In common with most others of its class, the account of its origin is not such as to command general acceptance. We are told that an eastern monarch in the year 30 of our era, Agbarus by name, King of Edessa, in Asia Minor, fell sick, and having heard of our Lord's miracles in the adjacent country of Judea, sent to request a visit. But the Saviour, ministering only to the sheep of the house of Israel, instead of going himself, the legend states, sent His portrait, painted purposely by S. Luke, the miraculous effect of which was such that the sick man recovered immediately on beholding it. The long list of miracles it has performed since is depicted in relief on the silver shrine in which it is enclosed. Whatever may be thought of the legend, the evidence of the great antiquity of the work is singularly clear and conclusive. Eusebius quotes ecclesiastical writings then extant, to show that this picture was known to exist in the royal library at Edessa in the middle of the second century, and was then considered an undoubted work of the apostolic age. Mores Coronere, an Armenian of the fourth century, also mentions it as in his possession, in his capacity of keeper of the royal archives at Edessa; his authority must, on this account, be unquestionable, and the German critic, Schröder, hesitates not to style him an author "*optimæ notæ et indubitatæ fidei*." Again, in the same century, S. Ephrem, deacon of the church at Edessa, makes mention of it. Eusebius, on his own authority, speaks of it as existing in his time. The historian Evagrius, in the sixth century, mentions it as performing many wonders in his days. The picture remained in its place in the royal library at Edessa till the Genoese, in the middle of the tenth century, removed it to its present locality in the church of S. Bartolomeo. Whoever may have been the painter, or whatever the circumstances under which it was executed, the account given above must establish it as a work of high antiquity and of eastern origin; and, as such, it affords a means of judging of the antiquity of similar works, the history of which is less clear and satisfactory. Like the previously mentioned picture, this is also considered too sacred for the general gaze, and is

only shown on one day in the year. (A facsimile of it is given in Plate III.) Possessing less subject than the picture in the sacristy of S. Peter's, there is less scope in it for imagination and artistic skill. Still, as a mere portrait, it would be difficult to instance a work of higher character. The delicacy of the features generally, the peculiarly beautiful drooping eyebrow, the sweetness and, at the same time, the power of expression in the mouth, distinguish it, as these characteristics distinguish other of the cloth pictures, from the entire mass of contemporary Art. As the ascertained history of these works carries them up to the second century, and a popular belief (entitled to every consideration) held them at that time to be at least a century old, they supply a solution of the question suggested by the series of pictures in the catacombs, as to whence the tradition of the Likeness emanated, which the artists of Italy took for their guide.

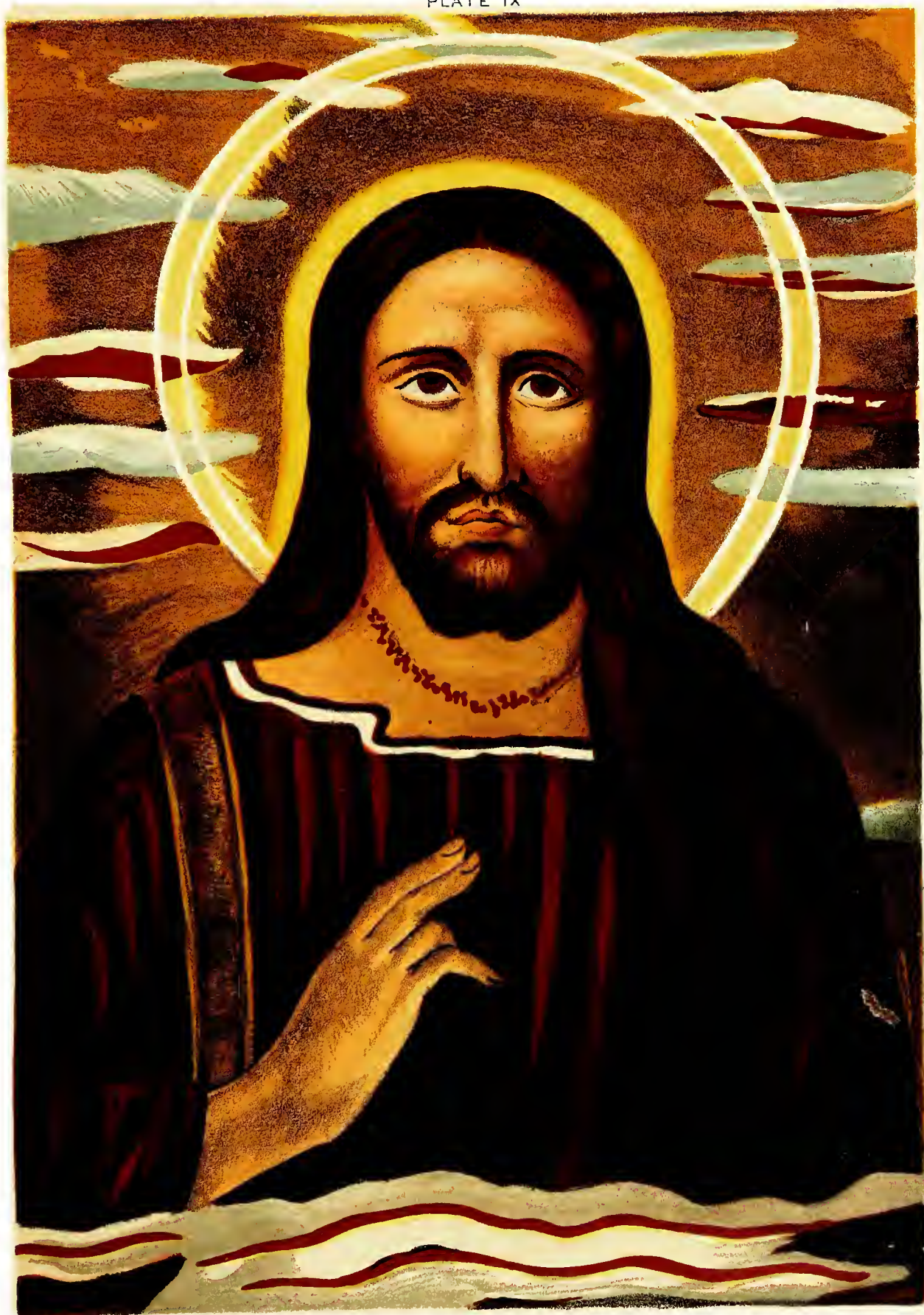
Of a date probably contemporary with the two works last mentioned, is the picture, a facsimile of which is given in Plate IV. The original, surrounded by a gold and jewelled mounting in the form of a nimbus, is now preserved in the Bibliotheca of the Vatican. The legend gives it as the work of the Evangelist S. Luke; but, independent of this, a credible and apparently authenticated history refers it to a period about the middle of the third century. Unlike the preceding works, it is executed in a thick water-colour or *tempera* pigment, on a panel of Cyprus wood, now nearly decayed. The medium in which the artist worked afforded him much more power of delineation, of which he did not fail to avail himself. The features are more made out and marked in character than is to be observed in the cloth pictures; perhaps in some respects this has detracted from the effect; for while the character is thoughtful, refined, and elevated in a high degree, it is perhaps less spiritual than the others. The impressiveness of the cloth pictures may result in some measure from their dimness, and the slightness with which they were originally executed, leaving something to be supplied by the mind of the beholder. In them the mind is directed rather to the Divine than to the human nature. We see the Almighty intelligence, clothed, it is true, in the similitude of a mortal face, as we could comprehend it under none other; but still it is the Divine intelligence, not the human, that addresses us. But in this last work, beautiful as it is, and even superior in artistic manipulation to the others, we see the Man rather than the Divinity—the ideal of sorrow and humility, rather than the personification of infinite love and mercy. One more example of the cloth pictures will be found in Plate V. It is preserved in the church of S. Silvestro at Rome, and is attributed by Catholic legend to the time of our Lord. These pictures are by no means isolated specimens, but are given here rather as types of a class, numerous both in Italy and the East; many other examples may be found which approach or equal them in merit.

In all the legendary histories that attach to the cloth pictures or handkerchiefs of S. Veronica, two facts are invariably present—their great antiquity and their Eastern origin. And as these facts are supported by well-authenticated history in at least two instances, there is strong reason for presuming that the accounts

given of them generally are correct in these particulars, though other details as to their origin may be only conjectural. It can hardly be doubted, from the great similarity these works bear to each other, that they are copies of some still older original that either from the facts connected with its origin or from its acknowledged authenticity had acquired such general recognition as to have become established as a model. The transparent medium in which they were wrought presenting no appearance of pigment, might not unnaturally, in a credulous and superstitious age, have given rise to the notion that they were miraculously impressed on the fabric, and the name of S. Veronica may be nothing more than a transformation of the words *vera icon*, or true image.

From a custom which there is reason to believe obtained from the earliest period, and which beyond question prevailed in the second century, it is probable that these cloths were worn upon the breast, concealed by the upper clothing, and were regarded as something of the nature of talismans. We find the name of *Christophoros*, or, "he that bears Christ in (or on) his breast," applied to Ignatius, a pupil of S. John, as well as to other early martyrs, who were examined on this very point when brought before the Roman tribunals. Possibly the words of S. Paul, "I bear on my body the marks of the Lord Jesus," may refer to some such practice. It is certain that amongst the earliest interments, a cloth with the Divine Likeness wrought upon it, has been frequently found placed over the face or breast of the deceased. And the practice of wearing such an image might probably have been alluded to in the customary sign of the cross (the letter X—not the crucifix, but the initial letter of the name of Christ) upon the breast, as a means of recognition by the members of the first Christian communities.

Having traced these works up to so early a period, and shown almost with certainty that they must have been copies of a still older picture, we come at length to the apostolic age. What inherent improbability is there that an apostle or a disciple of the name of Luke may have been their author? Amongst the many individuals with whom our Lord consorted while on earth, there were doubtless many possessed of attainments sufficient to enable them to make some practice of the arts of design. Barnabas was a landed proprietor in a Greek island. Luke, we read, was a physician. And in a time and country where the arts were so much cultivated, it is probable that both these, as well as many other members of the Church, possessed some power of expressing their ideas in an artistic form. This consideration forces on us the question—Is it possible to conceive that persons who knew that they had for years been daily in the actual presence of the Almighty Himself, visible and tangible to them under a human form; Who had died in their presence; Whom they had watched in the grave; and Who, by a suspension of the most absolute of natural laws, had risen from the dead and ascended into heaven in their view;—Is it possible to conceive that such persons would have made no attempt to figure to themselves, as far and indeed as often as they were able, the features and expression of the Divine appearance, as it lived in their memories? Universal tradition—call it legend, if we will—attests that they did; and in this



FROM THE BAPTISTERY OF CONSTANTINE.

respect is supported by what we know of human motives of action, as they have operated in all ages.

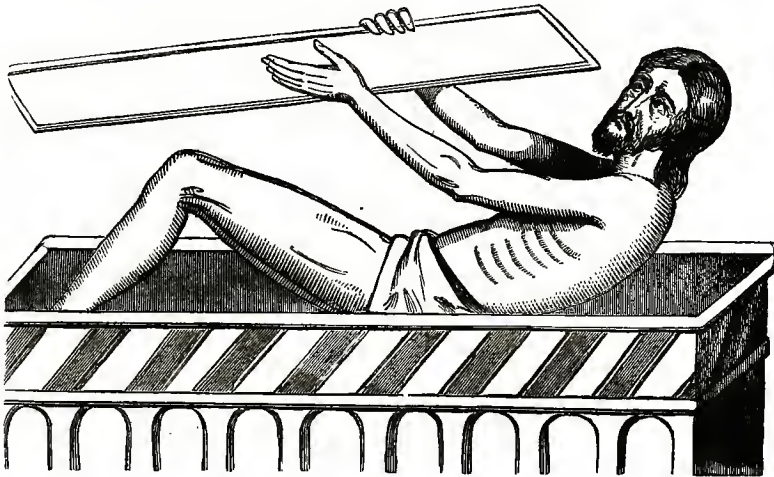
At a period shortly after the execution of the above works, a distinct branch of pictorial art was making its first efforts in a direction that was afterwards to lead to the unique development we see in the mosaic decorations of the fourth and subsequent centuries. It is difficult to assign any precise date to the commencement of the practice of wearing metal images during life, and burying them with the dead, that prevailed in the primitive Church. Certain it is that we find metal ornaments,



in the shape of figures of our Lord, that must date at least as early as the third century. The most ancient specimens, from the characters engraved on them, would appear to be of Greek workmanship. The first illustration on this page is from a work of this date; it is in bronze or copper, and is executed in what the sculptors term the half-round. The original is now in the Bibliotheca of the Vatican.

Owing to the peculiar nature of the material it was inevitable that works on so small a scale should be marked and distinct rather than refined in character. Consequently, the Likeness will be found to be coarsely, though decidedly, rendered.

In the earliest specimens these images are composed simply of metal ; but in works of about the fourth century the metal is generally found combined with ornamentation in the nature of mosaic or enamel work. This mode of decoration was first used to indicate drapery or symbolic ornaments only ; but it was afterwards extended to the delineation of the face and figure indiscriminately, till we find the whole work covered with it. Of the mixed metal and mosaic work beautiful instances are given on the preceding and on this page, the second of which represents an amulet, or plate, worn upon the breast, containing an image of our Lord, surrounded by apocalyptic emblems. In these the face, the drapery, and the ornamental portions of the background, are executed in mosaic or enamel, it is difficult to say which ; the distinctions between the two depending upon whether the pieces of glass that enter into the composition of both modes were originally fixed to the metal ground by fusion or by cement. The Likeness of our Lord, as depicted on these flat, metal pictures, is peculiarly clear and distinct, conforming to the traditional type with only



the slight variations of darker hair, a more attenuated visage, and the introduction of two stray pieces of hair at the top of the forehead, a peculiarity by which all Byzantine works executed before the eighth century may be recognized. The enamel represented above is, considering the early date that must be attributed to it, a remarkably beautiful one. The act of lifting the lid of the grave in token of the return to life, may seem, to our notions, somewhat grotesque, but it is apt and expressive, and it would be difficult to say by what action the idea could be more plainly rendered. The absence of the further limb is apparently in accordance with some law of representation by which the enamel workers of the early centuries were guided, and is less obtrusive in the original than in the illustration. This work was taken from a grave in the catacombs that would appear to have been occupied about the commencement of the fourth century, or immediately previous to the conversion of the empire.

CHAPTER VI.

ENAMELS AND METAL WORK.



WE have seen that the Christians of the pseudo Greek races, occupying Asia Minor and Byzantium, appear in all ages to have entertained an especial devotion to pictorial as distinguished from sculpturesque representations.

The Church in these countries, from the earliest period, steadfastly rejected all aid from the plastic arts in the symbolizing of sacred forms, or in the decoration of their religious buildings. The "making the likeness" of any Divine, or indeed human object in relief, or in what the sculptors term the round, seems to have been considered as an infringement of the Divine command against graven images, and as such coming within the definition of idolatry. But the representation of objects on a flat surface not being specifically included in the terms of the prohibition, that form of delineation was used with an universality and an earnestness of purpose that has scarcely been seen in any other age or people. The style of the earlier productions of Christian portraiture in these countries was at first much affected by the conventionalities of contemporary sculpture; but as sculptural art declined, painting became characterized by forms and modes of study peculiar to itself. Barbarous and unlearned as it was at first, after a time it manifested an amount of artistic power that, though never arriving at absolute excellence, was yet capable of influencing all contemporary Art, and finally it led to the revival of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

The progress of Greek or Byzantine Art was destined never to exceed certain limits. A time arrived when, in common with the philosophy, the religion, and the pervading intellect of the people, it was to become fixed and petrified, so as to admit of no further change or development. Other schools of Art, the Italian, the German, might be generated by it, but for itself it was to know no further progress. This was not altogether a loss to the future. Types and traditions of sacred things, that had been handed down historically from the first age of the Church, have been thereby transmitted to us unaltered, untampered with by either the ignorance or the erratic imagination of the painter. In Germany and Italy, as elsewhere, the unfettered liberty of the artist allowed of the Divine resemblance being portrayed with all the variations of form and expression that might suit the fashion of the moment or the ideas of the painter, who might thereby hope to establish a reputation

for originality. The Greek or the Asiatic artist was allowed no such liberty. Generally a monk, he felt it incumbent on him to hand down the traditional form and features of Christ in even the most minute integrity, as much as it was his duty to transmit the tenets of his faith unaltered. Or if the artist were a layman working for the Church, a strict and uncompromising monitor was at his elbow, in the shape of an ecclesiastic, forbidding any, even the slightest, divergence from the recognized type.

As a natural consequence of this continual repetition, such works will be found to lack all life, freshness, and feeling, and, on the contrary, to possess a hard rigidity of character which, while it renders the picture less attractive, evidences the conciseness of the tradition in which it originated. So fixed and rigid has this form of representation become in all Eastern works of Art, that were it not for the freshness of the materials, it would be difficult to distinguish a picture painted to-day from the production of the third century. The same hard type, the same symbolic accessories, the same gold, vermillion, and azure, will be found in each.

Greek Art has for the last fifteen hundred years been absolutely stationary; prolific enough as far as regards the mere quantity of its productions, but neither advancing nor receding, its whole aim being apparently to reproduce its traditional forms with more than Chinese fidelity. The immobility of the Greek tradition may be observed also in the Greek faith; unchangeable, it knows of no development, and any alteration or addition to its doctrines, such as we have recently witnessed in the Western Church, would in it be absolutely impossible. The same persistence may be observed in the feelings with which artistic productions are regarded by the Eastern populations of the present day. The miraculous legends that are recounted to us by Italian sacristans and custodians, in reference to the older Greek pictures, have, in all probability, been handed down from the earliest centuries, since they were as common and as recognized when the Empress Helena adopted measures for the preservation of such works, as they are to-day; and the superstitious feeling with which modern Greeks and Russians regard their pictures, is but the survival of the same sentiment that in the first ages of the Church prompted its members to invest certain works with supernatural efficacy.

The practice of wearing an effigy of the Saviour under the clothing, which may be traced in the Eastern Church during the first and second centuries, has continued to the present day. We read how in the Crimean war every Russian, whether taken dead or alive, was found with an amulet in the shape of a sacred portrait; and travellers concur in remarking on the intense devotion of the Eastern Church for pictorial representations of Divine things, and that not for their intrinsic value as works of art. Everywhere, in public and in private, in every room of the cottage, in every shop, in every public office, at the corners of the streets, in taverns, in steamboats, is the picture hung, with lamps or candles burning before it, and regarded with a reverence far exceeding anything of the kind that is to be seen even in Italy. In private life, the picture, not the image (as in the Western Church), plays the part of the family Bible, of the wedding gift, of the birthday present, and

finally accompanies the member of the Church to his last resting-place. Identified with the domestic life, it has also entered into the national life. A picture has become a watchword of a country's faith and nationality. Eastern armies fight under a picture for a banner. In a church it is an indispensable appendage rather than an adventitious aid to devotion. At any time during the last fifteen hundred years a Greek ecclesiastical edifice, from the basilica to the smallest chapel, will be found covered from top to bottom, from side to side, walls and roofs, and screens and columns, with a mass of gilded pictures. These are seldom of any artistic value, nor are they put there apparently for the sake of show or effect, but to subserve some unexplained feeling of reverence for antique traditions. And they will be found all cast in the same ancient mould, and overcast with the same ancient hue; and each, from the smallest figure to those gigantic ones which look down on you



with their large eyes from the arched vaults above, performs a part, and bears a recognized relation to the whole.

The ancient productions of Byzantine Art, in which the type or pattern of subsequent works originated, have been exposed to more than the ordinary amount of destructive influences. Pagan barbarism, iconoclastic prejudice, and finally Mahometan fury, operated to their annihilation. The superb mosaics of the churches of the East, and, in most instances, those of Italy, the pictures in the monasteries, and those belonging to the laity, as far as these last could be discovered, were all involved in one common destruction. A very few churches in Sicily, in Ravenna, and in Rome, escaped, and in a corner of the roof of the Mosque of St. Sophia, at Constantinople, there may still be seen a portion of the ancient mosaic that has escaped the general destruction. But from these causes the most ancient

and reliable instances of Byzantine Art are to be found in the metal enamel pictures that, in consequence of their having been worn secretly by the living, or interred with the dead, have been preserved with but little, if any, deterioration to the present day.

The illustration on page 59 is, perhaps, the oldest instance of Greek or Byzantine metal-work extent ; it is executed either in solid gold or in gold plate, of about the size rendered in the engraving. The antiquity of this work, besides being established by the sepulchre whence it was taken, is evidenced by the mode of its workmanship. A metal image in the round, or in high relief, would have fallen under the letter of the prohibition of the second commandment, whereas the same object worked in low relief escaped it ; we see therefore just as much projection given to the whole figure as was absolutely necessary to effect any representation at all. The traditional



features will all be found thoroughly marked, and the attitudes of the hands, the one in benediction, and the other holding the scroll, are in conformity with the fashion that had established itself in these respects from the middle of the second century. After the date at which it may be assumed that this work was executed, it was found that the combination of mosaic with metal-work afforded a readier mode of delineation than the low relief, besides being more distinctly separated from anything that could be included under the Divine prohibition. Of these enamel works, an especially beautiful one is now in the treasury of S. Mark's, at Venice, to which place it was brought from Constantinople at an early period of the tenth century. The colouring in the original is exceedingly gorgeous, the robe being of bright violet and gold, which, with the blue nimbus and the scarlet of the symbolic figures, unite in rich and perfect harmony. An outline of it is given above.

The art of mosaic in coloured glass (as distinguished from naturally coloured stone) became extraordinarily developed immediately on the Christianizing of the Empire. A more detailed account of these works will form the subject of the concluding chapter.

The eclipse of Christian Art caused by the invasion of Rome by the Ostro-Goths of the sixth century, was not of long duration ; but while it lasted it was complete, and any works in the possession of the people were either executed by stealth in the workshop of the smith, or had been secreted from the general destruction. Two



instances of these works, as being more interesting than most others of their class, are given ; the first in Plate VI. This, it will be seen, represents a whole-length figure of our Lord carrying the book, and in the act either of benediction or teaching. It would be difficult adequately to describe the particularly living and speaking appearance of the original. The execution of the features and of the figure generally is ruder than in most works of the same age and class ; nevertheless it fixes the attention of the beholder with a commanding spirituality peculiar to itself. The eyes, though

represented with no more elaboration than a piece of blue and a piece of white flat glass could afford, still seem in combination with the concentrated expression of the mouth, to address the spectator and to follow him to whatever part of the room he may move. The mode of workmanship is almost unique. Thin strips of metal (gold or bronze) appear to have been placed upright in different divisions through the figure, which is in relief, and about one inch in thickness and about two feet in height; a coloured molten glass would then seem to have been poured between these ridges or walls of metal to form the drapery and the figure: over this, in smaller pieces, the glass with which the face and ornaments were delineated appears to have been affixed either by a second fusion or by cement. This unique work was disinterred from beneath the pavement of the church of S. Maria, in Trastevere, in the year 620, at which time it must have lain buried (for secrecy, as it was not found in a grave) at least a century. It is now in the museum of the Roman College, and I was enabled to make a copy of it by the kindness of Father Garucci, the principal of that establishment.

The second example to which I have referred will be found upon page 61. It is from an amulet or talisman, intended to be worn under the dress, either as a secret or cabalistic symbol, whereby members of the Church might be recognized by each other, or, what is more probable, as a charm against evil influences. The work is executed entirely in enamel upon metal. The expression of the countenance in the original is well, indeed, beautifully, given. The profusion of symbolic ornamentation, and the form of the Alpha and the Omega, at the feet and on the seat, indicate that it is a work of a period between the fourth and the sixth centuries. It can scarcely be of a later date, as, after that age, the cloak or toga is universally represented with a bordering similar to the ecclesiastical vestments of the period.

In the enamel pictures of the East, will be discovered the germ of those principles of brilliant and harmonious colouring that have, ever since, obtained in the schools. The Greek cloth pictures, though they surpassed them in expression, possessed no qualities of either arrangement or of colour. The frescoes of the catacombs, while often excellent in arrangement, were limited to the few chalky tints afforded by the earthen pigments. In the Byzantine school, the discovery of the manufacture of coloured glass, with its endless series of intense azure, gold, and scarlet, enabled the painter to endow his works with a gorgeousness, and, at the same time, with a special character of harmony, that distinguish them from the productions of any other age or country. This peculiarity of the school is visible not only in such works of Art as those of which we have been speaking, but in its architecture also.

PLATE X.



FROM THE BASILICA OF ST PAUL, ROME.

CHAPTER VII.

MOSAICS FROM THE CATACOMBS.



THE sudden and extraordinary development of the Arts immediately following the conversion of the Empire, in the beginning of the fourth century, is one of those historical events which seem to conform to none of the laws by which intellectual progress is governed, and, in the present state of our information, appears to be inexplicable.

During the first three centuries, the position of the Church being directly antagonistic to the most vindictive and powerful government, perhaps, that the world has seen, the ordinances of its worship were administered in places secluded from public observation. The determination and pertinacity with which the pagan Cæsars sought to destroy the worshippers, and to eradicate their faith, must have rendered the assembling in a recognized religious building, at the least very difficult. Probably such churches or chapels as existed other than those in the subterranean cemeteries, were merely portions of private houses set apart for the purpose. It would follow that, excepting on the confined and limited scale that we see in the pictures of the catacombs or in such small ornamentation as might have been used in the chamber of a private dwelling, any exercise of the art of church decoration must have been impracticable, and anything like the formation of a school of Art, that might by the accumulation of æsthetic knowledge through successive generations have led to the extraordinary display of artistic power exhibited in the age of Constantine, was simply impossible. But while scarcely the germ of this power is to be traced in the earlier works, the mode, and perhaps the excellence, of the mechanical execution is common to the productions of each period. The Church of the first ages, in admitting the Arts into its service, was careful to use them under forms distinctly separate from those in which they had ministered to idolatrous worship or to the luxury of paganism. We have seen that painting, previously confined to mere architectural decoration, as the medium of the Church's teaching rose, and developed a new life, appropriating to itself the forms of composition and beauty that have ever since distinguished it. The art of sculpture, having been more identified with idolatry, was, for some centuries at least, utterly discarded by the Church; and, from the few remains that exist, it seems that the architects of the first

Christian buildings rejected the style of the pagan temples for one entirely distinctive and *sui generis*. So, in adopting mosaic decoration into its service, the Church impressed it with new and peculiar characteristics. Previously, its practice had been confined to the coarse and rude delineation afforded by embedding small pieces of naturally-coloured stones in cement, and its application would seem to have extended no further than the ornamentation of pavements, or occasionally of a piece of furniture—the limited range of colour and the intractability of the material directing its use solely to the lower styles of architectural decoration. The substitution of coloured glass in the place of the naturally-coloured stone effected an entire change both in its character and the uses to which it could be applied.

From the peculiarity of the glass ornaments and vessels of the first ages of the Church, there is reason to believe that certain secrets in glass manufacture were confined to the guilds or confraternities of Christian workmen. Anything of the nature of the gilt pateræ found in the catacombs (in which we see the gold leaf embedded in the very heart of the glass) is unknown amongst the pagan productions of the period, and the application of stained glass to mosaic and enamelled metal work is to be found during the first three centuries only in the productions of the Christian workshops. The new, and it might be termed the Christian, character thus imparted to the hitherto pagan art, endowed it with new capacities. That which was before applied only to the lowest style of decoration, was now to be the choicest adornment of the holiest of holies of the Christian temple. Humble this temple was,—generally a mean and obscure apartment in a secluded part of the pagan city, often nothing better than a cavern in the ground; but the Church of that day, though it had not yet learnt to pride itself on the gorgeousness of its habitations, deemed it necessary, when practicable, that the portion of the chamber set apart for the dispensing of religious ordinances, should be distinguished by appropriate symbolic decoration.

In the pictures of the earliest catacomb chapels, we have seen that the subjects of the illustrations had exclusive reference either to the consolations of the Church, or to its distinctive teaching. As generations passed away, and as the Christian flock became better versed in the tenets of its faith, this pictorial instruction was, in a great measure, dispensed with, and, in its stead, we find the decorations which previously had been applied indiscriminately over the whole body of the edifice, confined principally to the chancel, and having direct reference to the authority of the priestly office, and the nature of the religious ordinances dispensed therefrom. Thus the priest engaged in the holy offices of the altar might refer for the sacred character of his mission directly to the pictured semblance of our Lord with the book in His hand as the great teacher; or, for the sanctity of the sacrament he was administering, to the story of the origin of that sacrament delineated on the wall above.

The more perfect adaptability of the new material to purposes of architectural decoration, its greater durability, and its brilliance, so peculiarly fitting it for the adornment of dark recesses, were probably the reasons that caused mosaic work,

when practicable, to be used in preference to the earlier mode of painting in fresco. As the third century approached its completion, the practice of what may be termed Christian, as distinctive from Pagan, mosaic had become general—though the disadvantageous circumstances under which such works were produced necessitated their being small in size and somewhat ruder and less artistic than the fresco pictures in their execution. Only the few works in this manner that existed in the catacombs have come down to us. Perhaps the oldest, and certainly the best authenticated of these, are two taken from the catacombs of St. Agnese, and now in the Christian Museum of the Lateran. An outline of one of these works is given below; the other is given in facsimile in Plate VII.

As undoubted specimens of the earliest mosaic work, a greater interest attaches to



these than their excellence as works of art would otherwise command. The Likeness in the portrait of our Lord, though the expression is negated by the rudeness of the delineation, conforms in every respect to the received tradition, even to the minute characteristic of the two pieces of stray hair in the middle of the forehead. There is also the peculiar drooping brow, and the form of the beard growing away from the chin. The third century is assigned as the date of these works. This is indicated by the position they occupied, the character of the symbolism, the Alpha and the Omega on the robe, the book in the hand, the form and the colour of the nimbus, and the mode of spelling the name within the circle. While in artistic execution and correctness of drawing they are of the lowest order—in these respects much below

the works of contemporary art in fresco—the colouring and design are most excellent. In the picture of the infant Saviour and the Virgin mother (outlined upon page 65), the colours are less brilliant, but equally harmonious. The draperies of the figures are white, the background of deep blue, and in the two corners are the exact counterparts of the conventional crimson curtain seen so continually in pictures by Lawrence and his imitators. While the execution of this picture is at least as rude as that of the preceding, the action and grouping of the figures are not without grace. When, however, the higher qualities of design are found united with rude and ignorant execution, there is strong presumptive evidence of the work being a copy, by an inferior hand, of a more perfect original; and various other circumstances connected with these two mosaics would lead to the conclusion that they are transcripts from some older work, which, from its excellence, was taken as a type by the mosaic workers of the succeeding centuries—one of such circumstances being the introduction of a string of beads round the neck of our Lord. In the earlier mosaic pictures this necklace is universal; although what was its origin or signification has never yet been satisfactorily explained. The other works of the same period differ in little or nothing from those just instanced: they are rude in execution, and yet they possess fine qualities, pointing directly to the existence of originals of a superior order. Probably the works that have been found in the catacombs are only inferior copies from others which, being designed for the churches above ground, were executed in a more careful style. One more illustration is given in this place, Plate VIII., a mosaic taken from the Roman catacombs. It is said to have been the work of a Pagan artist employed by a Christian, and to have borne an inscription to the effect that the likeness was not satisfactory, having too much the appearance of a Pagan philosopher. Being undoubtedly a work of great antiquity I copied it closely, even to the divisions of the stones of the mosaic.

CHAPTER VIII.

MOSAICS FROM THE CHURCHES.



THE persecuted Christian Church of the first three centuries possessed buildings appropriated exclusively to religious worship, the only remains of such edifices are to be seen in the churches of S. Stefano Rotundo, on the Cœlian Hill, at Rome, and the chapel, or baptistry, of S. Constanza, outside the Porta Pia. The form of both these buildings is circular, or polygonal, with a peculiarly complex internal structure, affording additional evidence (assuming the tradition to be correct that they were ancient Christian chapels) that the Church, in its architecture as in its painting, was studious to impress a distinctively Christian character on the Arts admitted to its service. It is said that the baptistry of Constantine was merely the renovation of an older temple. If it were not so, it is certain that it was amongst the first buildings erected after the conversion of the Empire, and it conforms in general design, and in its internal decorations, to the style that had been previously followed. Consequently, we see the octagonal form, and the complex internal structure, that is still remaining perfect in S. Stefano. Its mosaic pictures, executed immediately after the erection of the building, have every distinctive feature in common with the works of the preceding centuries, but exhibit a decidedly higher order of execution. The same type of Likeness is seen in the portraits of our Lord, partaking rather of the Byzantine than the Italian characteristics, and again repeating the introduction of the string of beads round the neck. The illustration given in Plate IX. is from the chancel of the principal chapel attached to the baptistry, and is indisputably to be ascribed to the first years of the reign of Constantine. In this work we see, with a rigid adherence to the ancient tradition, a decided advance in many parts of the execution on anything that had gone before. This may, however, be owing to its having undergone extensive restorations immediately after the Gothic occupation in the fifth century. But in partaking of the character of the earlier pictures, the works of this time lost their appropriateness to the altered position of the Church. The Arts, to be the expression of the popular mind, must respond to the predominating sentiments of the community, or they will be but the lifeless husks of a worn-out idea. To the condition of the liberated Church, the types and symbolism of the period of its captivity were no longer applicable. In treating of the catacomb frescoes, we have seen the prepon-

derating influence exercised by the writings of the Apostle S. John over the ideas and forms of thought of the primitive Church ; and there cannot be a doubt but that in the days of which we are now speaking, the spiritual eye of Christianity saw, in the three hundred and twenty years of the Church's persecution, the realization of the apocalyptic vision of the "*woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars,*" pursued into the wilderness by the destroying dragon "*for a time, and times, and half a time.*" The Church, it was held, had, in fulfilment of her destiny, followed her Divine Spouse into the desert, there to be proved by conflict with the powers of darkness in high places. The fiery baptism of persecution and martyrdom was the path through which she must pass to the glorious destiny that the appointed time was to inaugurate for her. Nor to the Church in its collective signification only was this fiery probation necessary. To the individual member martyrdom came to be regarded, not merely as an undoubted, but rather as an indispensable title to admission at the heavenly portals. To minds attuned to this one idea, the continual contemplation of patterns of those heavenly things that were so soon and so surely to become visible realities, was nothing less than a necessity. And not only were these heavenly patterns recognizable in the specially designed symbols, but also in the common adjuncts and surroundings of their religious life. The cavern, the hole in the ground, to which the proscribed worshipper resorted, was but the type, the visible representation, of the Divine Master's condition while here on earth. The table at which he knelt, the tomb, with the dust of the martyrs beneath, was to him the very altar of God, from within which "*the souls of them that were slain for the testimony which they held*" cried out, "*How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost Thou not avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth ?*" The lamp on the table, necessary on account of the darkness of the subterranean chamber, was none other than the golden candlestick that—conditionally on the faith of the Church—was never to be removed out of its place. And in the decorative symbolism, the pictured attributes and functions of the Saviour were, in all instances, those that would more particularly address themselves to the ideas and aspirations of a suffering community. In our Lord, as the shepherd carrying the wounded lamb, the Christian flock beheld the protector ; as recalling Lazarus to life, the regenerator ; and, with the eternal Gospel in his hand, the originator of their creed. These forms of symbolism were but the natural expression of the mind of the Church in its adversity. But this condition had passed away. The Church was liberated, the dawn of the glorious morning so long looked for had broke, and the types and patterns of the captivity, speaking no longer to the heart of the people, became shorn of their significance, and though still continued as adjuncts to religious worship, and still regarded with a devout though formal reverence, they exercised no higher function than that of mere ecclesiastical decoration or commemoration.

The new phase that had opened upon Christianity required another phase of symbolism. Continuing the imagery of the Apocalypse, the Divine Founder of the faith was to be depicted not so much as the life-giver, or the protector of the persecuted Church, but as the heavenly conqueror descending to the new Jerusalem



FROM THE CHURCH OF SS. COSIMO AND DAMIAN.

to receive the bride, prepared and purified by suffering for the mystic marriage. The blasphemer of God and of His tabernacle, to whom was given to make war with the saints, was overcome, was cast down into the bottomless pit. The thousand years' reign of the Lord had been inaugurated, and the angel was already flying through the midst of heaven, "*having the everlasting Gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth.*" In referring in this manner to the prophecies of the Apocalypse, I would wish to be understood as merely recording the ideas and forms of thought of the Church of that period, and not myself making any attempt to penetrate the mysteries of the sacred writings. Modern expounders, it is well known, place the fulfilment of these prophecies at a period yet to come; but we can hardly be surprised that, in the exuberance of feeling and of hope consequent upon such a revolution, the Church should see in the appositeness of the inspired vision a direct reference to the events then in the course of consummation.

The houses of God were now no longer secluded chambers or caves in the ground. Chapels, churches, and basilicas rose in all quarters of the city, but the patterns of the heavenly things that had so identified themselves with the hopes and feelings of the community in times of persecution, were not to be lightly laid aside in the day of triumph. The table of the new basilica, gilt and jewelled though it was, seemed empty and meaningless in comparison with that table in the cavern some sixty feet below, under which were the remains of those Christian warriors, men and women, who had shed their blood for the testimony, and who, as it was believed, actually united by virtue of their physical presence in Church communion with the assembly congregated round their sepulchres, and participated with them in the same mystic sacraments. Accordingly, the new temple, with its architectural splendour and gorgeous decorations, became, not the rival nor the imitation of the pagan edifices around, but the development, the apotheosis of the humble cavern in the ground. The bones of the martyrs were transferred to it. The candlestick, though no longer a necessity, still shed its light on the assembled worshippers. Even the anagram of our Lord (the **X**), that had before been the distinguishing mark of the martyr's grave, was still, in the form of the cross, seen over the table of the new covenant; and the chancel, the holiest of holies, retained the same vaulted form that had been adopted as a necessity in the subterranean excavations. Even the more intricate recesses of the catacombs, that had been the secret receptacles of the relics of the departed in the faith, were now represented by the sacristy of the new temple; and people gladly brought such relics as they possessed, the clothes of departed relatives, amulets, sacred pictures preserved perhaps from the apostolic age itself, to place them in the newly consecrated buildings.

An extraordinary sight must have been the inauguration of the first Christian temples, and one the like of which is scarcely to be seen again. On the hill now called the Lateran was a small church, still remaining under the name of the Baptistry of Constantine. Scarcely fifty paces distant was the first, and with the exception of S. Peter's, most magnificent of Christian basilicas, that of S. John, rapidly approaching completion. Stretching far away into the Campagna, along the different roads

radiating from the adjacent gate of the city, might be seen long lines of people chanting litanies, and with solemn ceremonies bringing their long-treasured relics, their holy pictures, and the bodies of their martyred and canonized relations, from the secret chambers of the catacombs to the newly consecrated sacristy in the rising cathedral; while within the small Christian chapel was the imperial convert, stepping naked into the baptismal font, humbly to receive the initiatory rite from the hands of those who but a few short months before had been proscribed and persecuted outcasts. And by the side of their master, crowds of stern, grim soldiery and haughty nobles, now like him fain to address themselves to those whom, until then, they had hunted, trodden down, and crushed as the vilest of humanity. In the surrounding crowd, nay, even amongst the officiating priesthood, might be seen many still suffering with wounds from the terrible persecution that had raged with such violence but a few years previously. Some might be seen with the marks of wild animals, of the fire, of the knife, still upon them; some maimed of a limb, some without eyes; while within sight of that multitude was the column, but scarcely finished, commemorating this the most bloody persecution the Church had seen, and bearing inscribed on it the vain boast of the extermination of the Christian sect. And he, the builder, the inscriber of that column, the author of that persecution, the abdicated emperor, was but a few miles across the narrow sea—at his luxurious retirement in Dalmatia—calmly contemplating from his solitude the tremendous moral revolution which had already sapped the Empire to its base, and which, before another century, was to level it to the dust.

From the spot where the above scene was enacted might be seen, some two miles across the Campagna, another basilica in course of construction, dedicated to S. Paul, and second only in magnificence to its sister edifice on the Lateran. These new basilicas were decorated with all the lavish profusion that might be expected from new converts amongst the governing powers, who possessed in the inexhaustible treasures of the heathen temples a convenient means of exhibiting their zeal for their new faith. Gold, silver, and precious stones poured in in profusion from the shrines of idolatry to decorate the house of the one true God. The chancels of the new churches glittered with the candlesticks and the sacred vessels formed out of the re-cast metal. The communion-table, the steps leading to it, the episcopal chair, the columns, and even the pavement itself, were covered with the precious stones stripped from the adjacent heathen temples, while the whole vault of the chancel, and in many instances the entire building itself, from the flooring to the roof, walls, screens, and columns, even the darkest recesses, and often a great portion of the exterior of the building, was one mass of the most gorgeous mosaic painting. The subjects of the pictures—no longer limited to those that the Church had regarded with such affection in its adversity—were drawn from the exultant symbolism of the Apocalypse, and represented our Lord descending in clouds of glory from heaven to take possession of His kingdom, or to inaugurate the prophesied thousand years of His reign on earth. In the decoration of all the churches built during the age of Constantine, and indeed until the Gothic invasion of the next century, this coming of our Lord formed

the governing idea. While the writings of S. John, and in particular the fourth chapter of the Revelation, with its transcendently gorgeous imagery, in almost every case supplied the subject for representation.

The difficulties of rendering the imagery of the Apocalypse in a pictorial form, at a time when there existed no established conventionalisms on the subject to aid the painter, must have been very great. Yet it is precisely in the appropriate and expressive translation of the inspired allegories exhibited by the mosaic works of the fourth and fifth centuries, that one of the chief sources of their power exists.

Certain forms and modes of representing such celestial objects as cannot be included in our experience have become so established that any material departure therefrom would not now be likely to meet with other than the most limited acceptance. But the artist of the present day is often not aware that in adopting these recognised patterns of the heavenly things, he is indebted to the inventive genius of the nameless and untaught painters of the age of Constantine. Thus, "the door in heaven" of the first verse of the fourth chapter of Revelation, is represented as a blaze of golden light in the upper part of the picture, in which the indistinct forms of the cherubim are seen, almost lost in the glory emanating from the Divine presence. Below and around is a mass of dark, transparent blue, representing the crystalline heavens of the text, and sometimes managed so that small projections in the mosaic shall catch the oblique light, and give the effect of innumerable stars (this will be seen introduced with exceeding skill in the mosaic of the church of SS. Cosimo and Damian, in the Roman Forum). In the centre of the picture, our Lord is seated on the heavenly throne, and so minutely is the descriptive colouring of the original text adhered to, that the crimson robe of the Saviour will be seen (as in the picture in the Baptistry of Constantine) with an occasional stripe of white, to make it conform to the similitude of a "*jasper and sardine stone*." The "*rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald*," is rendered by a graduated green nimbus, in addition to the golden glory immediately behind the principal figure, surrounding which are seen the effigies of the Evangelists, each having "*the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth*," accompanied by the "*seven Spirits*" that stand before the throne of God, and the four-and-twenty elders clothed in white, all doing homage to Him who had now descended to the holy city, the eternal New Jerusalem, to commence His promised reign. Neither was this spirit of symbolism confined to the limits of the picture; the whole congregation on the pavement beneath were included in it. The Lord is depicted, not so much with reference to those by whom he is surrounded, as directly in communion with, and addressing Himself to, the assembled church below.

The universality of the representation of this subject at the period mentioned is one among many other facts which indicate that in the eyes of the Christian community of the fourth century, the existing crisis of the Church was regarded as the accomplishment of the apocalyptic prophecy of the second advent of our Lord. However the details of different pictures might be varied to suit the circumstances for which they were executed, the one idea of the commencement of the reign of CHRIST

upon earth was invariably predominant. Of the decorations of the two basilicas that were erected by Constantine, those of only one have been preserved. The earliest mosaics of the Lateran were destroyed by the Goths; but those in S. Paul's, though the church has been twice destroyed by fire, escaped on each occasion. The pictures in the apse suffered considerably during the barbaric invasion, and were repaired and partially replaced in the eighth century; but the most ancient and magnificent mosaic, on the arc of triumph between the nave and the chancel, not only passed unharmed through the two fires, but, on account of its height, it is said, defied all attempts of the barbarians to reach it. In this picture we see our Lord, as the regal Shepherd, encircled by a golden nimbus, behind which is another nimbus of graduated tints of green (see Plate X.). Around the principal figure are the celestial companies, introduced so as to apparently mix with, and form one congregation, with the worshippers on the floor beneath. The mechanical execution of this work is scarcely better than is seen in the earliest mosaics of the catacombs, but for the power of its conception, and the deep spiritual tone of thought with which it is worked out, it has rarely, if ever, been excelled; and considering that the circumstances of the period precluded anything like the formation of a progressive school of Art, the skill displayed in those qualities not immediately depending on the original intuition of the subject—such as the arrangement of the groups, and the general rendering of the scene—in this, as well as in most of the works of the same century, is quite astonishing. Hitherto the painter had had no opportunity of exercising his hand upon works above a very few square feet in size; but no sooner did the occasion arise for works on a grander scale, than we see produced perhaps the largest pictures that have ever been executed by the hand of man, and that not merely by a mechanical repetition that would render the largest space as easy to cover as the smallest, but with a power and an efficiency that proved the artist to have his space as well as his subject perfectly within his grasp. Often, indeed, so far from being scared by the size of his work, the painter actually felt the space at his disposal too small, as his picture will be seen overflowing its boundaries into all the recesses and crevices wherever a flat surface could be found.

Experience would indicate that the Arts, in common with literature and all pursuits resulting from the higher manifestations of the intellect, can only be developed in any degree of excellence by a long succession of consecutive and separate individual efforts. One generation of artists must succeed to another, each continuing the labours of the preceding, and bequeathing what may remain to be accomplished to the next to follow. A school is thus formed, that proceeds in regular course through its phases of infancy, culmination, and decline. This transmission of intellectual acquirement from one generation to another, would appear, from the history of all other times and peoples, to be absolutely essential to intellectual progress; but these conditions being entirely absent in the case referred to, we are compelled to look for an explanation of the sudden and spontaneous development of the Arts at this period in the stimulative effect on the general intellect of the people, consequent on the vast revolution that had taken place in the social fabric of society,

as well as in the destinies of the Church. In the general enthusiasm the great spirit of the people seems to have asserted itself suddenly, and left proofs of its momentary but unexampled power. Therefore it is that the works of this period, though executed on the most colossal scale, possess every artistic quality, excepting those that are only to be acquired by a long and individual course of study. The drawing was always faulty, the arrangement of the groups formal and too exactly balanced, and the attitudes stiff and often repeated; but for grandeur of the original conception, for harmony and gorgeousness of colour, and often for intense power of expression, many of these productions have never been surpassed. I am aware that, from a certain dry Gothicism of manner, a superficial observer will feel them to be rugged and repulsive; but, like all great natural or human productions, they require to be approached in a fitting spirit. While I was copying the principal figure in the above-mentioned picture in S. Paul's, I was continually hearing the depreciatory remarks of my sight-seeing country-people, who would devote, perhaps, ten minutes to one of the first buildings in Christendom, and then adjourn for three hours to the gardens of the Osteria opposite. The basilica, standing at the end of a fine drive two miles away from the city, along the banks of the Tiber, is, towards the end of the day, a favourite place of holiday resort. An open carriage, a two-mile gallop, with a merry, perhaps a rather uproarious, party, and a house of entertainment at the end of the road, are excellent things in their way, and not, on any account, to be undervalued; but they are scarcely conducive to the tone of mind in which a sacred and spiritual work, such as the one to which I now allude, can be comprehended. But sit down beneath that arch; think nothing of how Raphael, Titian, or Correggio would have painted that head, still less of the feminine inanities of Carlo Dolce and the later Italian school of which you have probably just seen too much at the Roman galleries; chase from your mind every thought of to-day and surrounding things, and fix it on the one idea of the relation in which you stand to Him who is there depicted—a wretched, lost atom of humanity, doomed to what words cannot express—that infinite Being, descending to this earth, undergoing pain, wretchedness, and every conceivable form of degradation and misery, to drag you from that perdition on the one only condition implied in the words (written on the picture), “*Lovest thou Me?*” Then open your eyes, turn them on the face above, and say whether the suffering, emaciated, loving countenance was ever so perfectly, so spiritually rendered.

In this picture we perceive an elevation of character not to be found in any work from the catacombs, in this respect closely approaching the Greek cloth pictures in S. Peter's and S. Bartolomeo's. The broad, full, intellectual forehead, the finely-arched brow, the full eye, and rather Greek-cut nose, distinctly evidence the Eastern tradition of the Likeness. This picture would appear to be the first, for above two centuries, that represented our Lord without the book in the hand, notwithstanding that the letter of the text almost demanded it. But what were the circumstances under which it was painted? The Christian flock had just been conducted by their heavenly Shepherd to a secure pasturage. The idea of the Divine teacher was not directly involved; but we see instead the Lord with the shepherd's staff (the only

instance I can call to mind of its introduction) descending amidst the celestial powers to the succour of the Church, represented in the congregation below.

At the period in which this work was executed, we see the commencement of a distinct and progressive school of Art in Italy, characterized by powers of conception and colouring of the highest order, developing itself spontaneously, without any previous school to found its style upon, or from which to derive its canons of taste; entirely rejecting every form and expression of Art included in the practice of sculpture, and, in process of time, making such advances in artistic skill and power of delineation, that, had not its progress been arrested by the Gothic invasion of the next century, there is no telling how far it might have attained to excellence, or in what degree it might have affected all future Art.

The position attained by the Italian school of the fifth and sixth centuries is, perhaps, best indicated by the fine mosaic in the Church of SS. Cosimo and Damian, in the Roman Forum. The wall on which the work is executed is vaulted and semi-circular, presenting difficulties in the delineation of groups of large figures of no ordinary nature. Yet we here see the figures, though twelve feet in height, not only grouped with skill, but, notwithstanding the curvature of the wall, presenting the effect of being well posed and correctly drawn. The subject represented is from a portion of the second chapter of the Revelation:—“*These things saith the Son of God, who hath His eyes like to a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass.*” “*He that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations.*” “*And I will give him the morning star.*” Our Lord is seen descending from the deep blue sky, with the book or scroll in His hand, and addressing the Saints and Apostles assembled in the lower part of the picture. The entire conception, the action, and the expression of this figure, are rendered with a majesty and sublimity, to my thinking, exceeding anything to be seen in any other production of Art. I am not now giving my own impressions alone; the work in question is celebrated throughout Europe, and the late accomplished President of our Royal Academy, Sir C. L. Eastlake, in his edition of Kugler, mentions it in terms of unqualified praise. The action of the principal figure is noble, simple, and natural, and the dress, being entirely of gold, to represent the “flame of fire” of the text, is in perfect harmony with the deep, transparent ultramarine of the background. A transcript of this figure is given in Plate XI. This picture, having suffered during the Gothic occupation of the city, was restored in the seventh century, by direction of Pope Urban. If it be urged that the excellence of this figure is to be ascribed rather to the restorer than to the first painter, the fact would only be the more surprising, as it is less difficult to conceive of the production of a work of such power, after a century and a half of uninterrupted practice of the arts, than immediately following the long period of their utter neglect and obscurity.

The deep vein of allegorical thought pervading the whole of the mosaic pictures of this period, is suggestive to a degree that can hardly be exaggerated. In those instances where any addition to the strict title of the text was admissible, the Lord, accompanied by the celestial host, will be seen descending to a green field covered

with blooming flowers—typical of Paradise—in the midst of which are walking the saints and martyrs of past ages. In front of these, and across the picture, runs the mystic Jordan—typical of death—through which the fish, denoting those who have died in the faith, are seen passing. On the nearer side of the river, not amid flowers but thorns and sometimes serpents and snares, are bishops and other persons then living; whilst the Christian Church generally is represented under the form of a flock of sheep, occupying the extreme foreground of the picture, and drinking, not of Jordan, but of the river of the water of life, flowing in four streams from beneath the throne of God.

Neither did the excellence of this school portray itself alone in an occasional



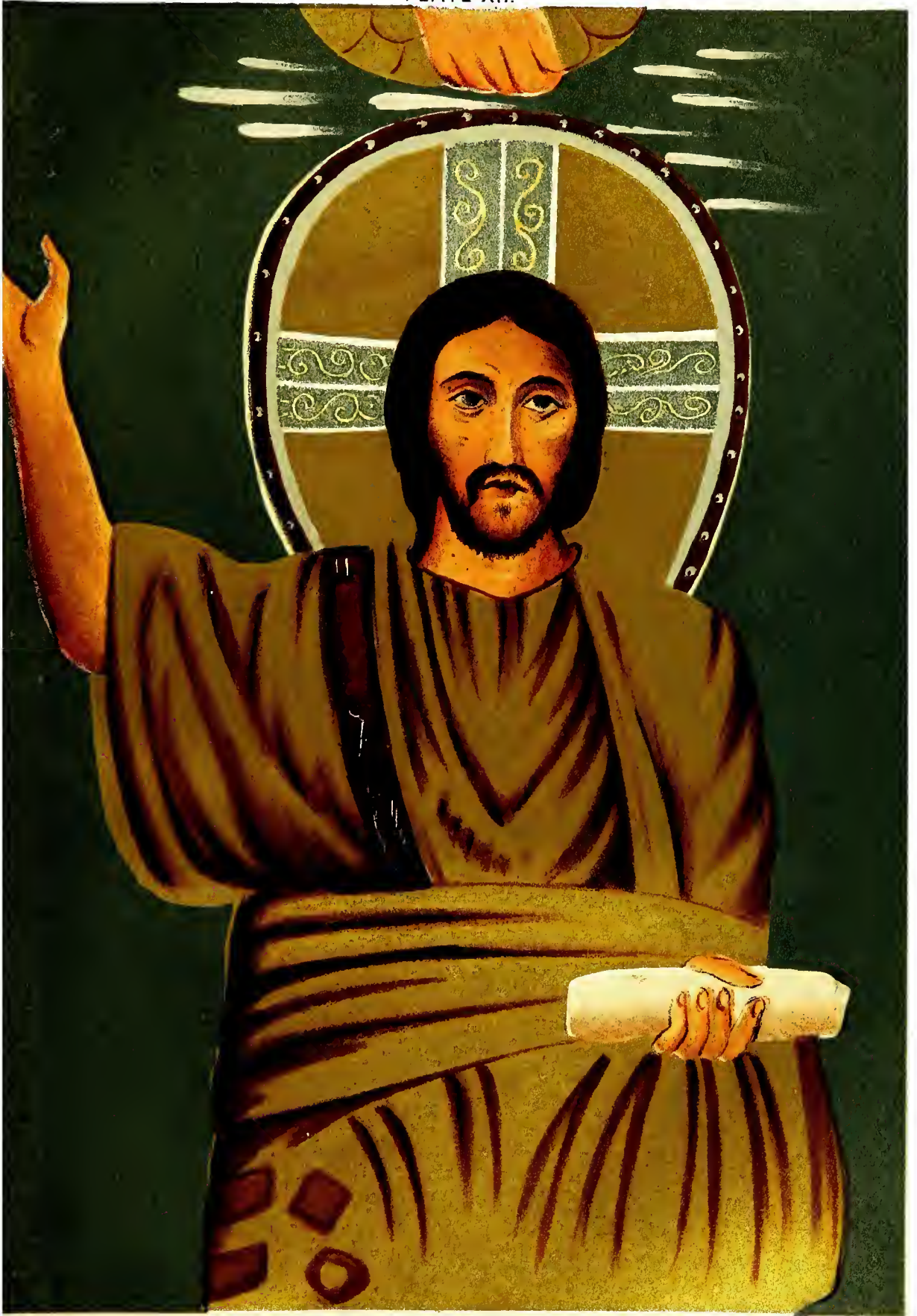
majestic figure or appropriate expression. Forms of beauty began to develop themselves, such as, if priority of date may establish a claim to originality, have formed patterns for the Art of all succeeding ages. In the two exquisite figures of angels, from the great mosaic in the Church of S. Maria Maggiore (given on this page), who will not at once recognize the originals of the angels of all succeeding Christian Art, whether in painting or in sculpture? The simplicity, purity, and graceful flow of line in the attitudes, have scarcely been surpassed in the best period of the best schools. Again, the terminal angel from the Chapel in S. Praseide, called the *orto paradiso* (given on the next page), for chaste severity of style, is surely worthy of a place among the worthiest. But the early Italian

school attained its high position by entire and undisturbed unity of purpose. Numberless as are the productions of the first five centuries, scarcely one of them is to be found wherein the portrait of our Lord¹ is not either the sole or the principal object represented; the whole intention and effort of the painter was directed to the delineation of this one figure; we see it, in the vast majority of instances, far exceeding in every artistic quality the other portions of the same composition. Popes, saints, martyrs, and apostles were introduced plentifully in many of these pictures; but, with the exception of two, or perhaps three, of the actual companions of our Lord, no consentaneous type became established of their features, and comparatively but little study or attention was bestowed on their delineation. The



whole thought of the painter, and seemingly the whole attention of the beholder, was concentrated on the representation of that one Divine form. So much was this the case, that it is not going too far to say that all Christian Art, whether of that or of succeeding ages, took its origin in the depicting of this one countenance. It formed the point round which all artistic effort revolved, on which all artistic thought concentrated itself. In the Veronica pictures of the first and second centuries, we see the most earnest devotedness, the most absolute singleness of purpose applied to the depicting of this one object. In the dark subterranean chambers of the catacombs; at the graves of the martyrs; at the altars of the suffering Church;

¹ That given in Plate XII. is from the same chapel (S. Prasele).



FROM THE CHAPEL OF ST PRASEDE.

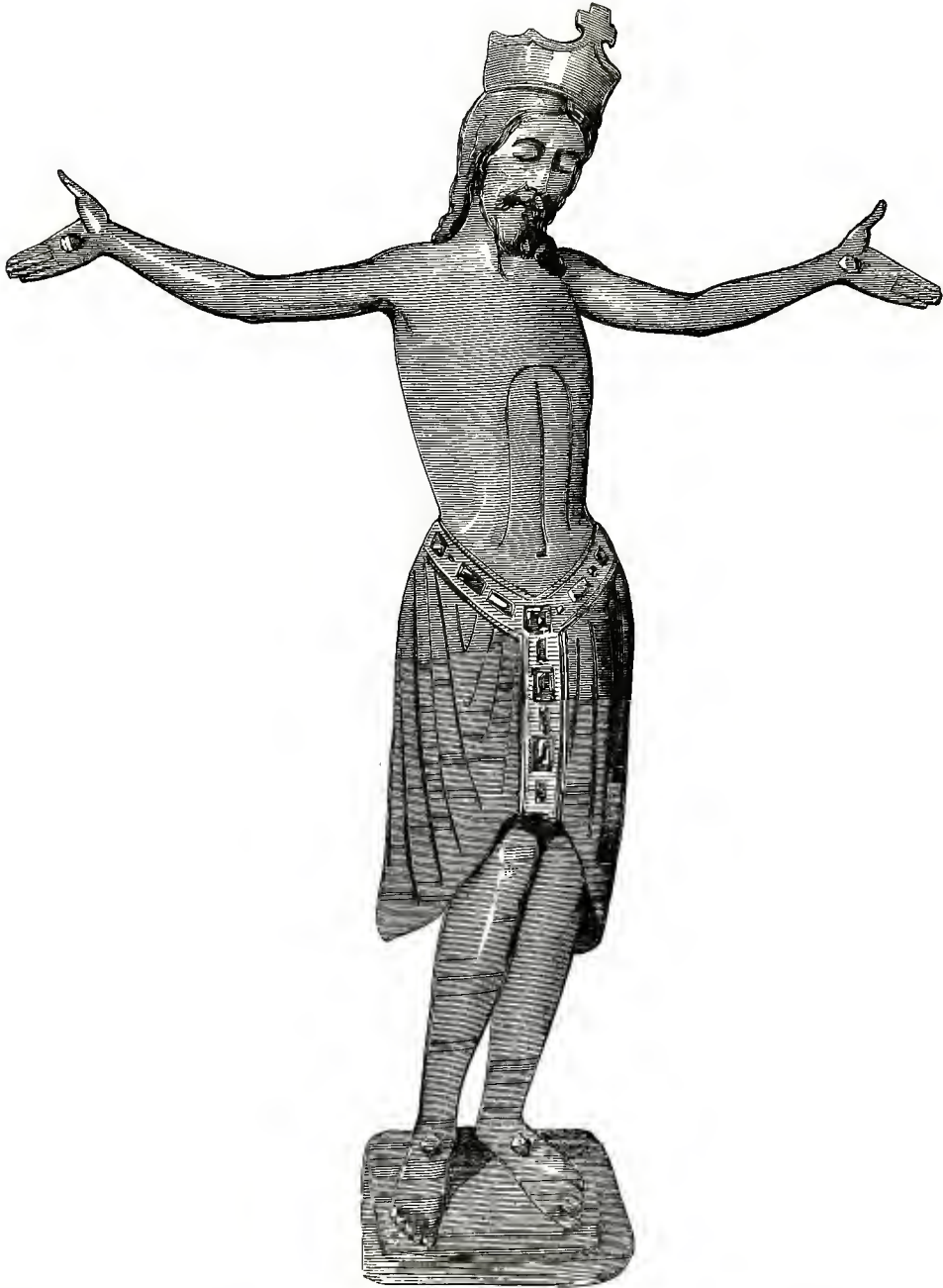
the yearnings, the aspirations, the consolations of the Christian flock were centred on the representations of this one form. Here, in these dark chambers, it may be truly said that all succeeding pictorial Art had its origin, planted like a seed in the ground, germinating and throwing out its roots in the darkness. Reared in humility, as the handmaid to a proscribed and persecuted Church; chastened by self-denial; elevated by faith; cradled into poetic eloquence by suffering; it became vitalized, inspired, by that Divine energy that gave it so potent an influence over the destiny of future generations. The Art taught in that school was born of no academy, imparted by no professors; it was the simple, childlike language of the deep heart of the people, the expression of those spiritual yearnings of the imperfect after the perfect, that cannot be uttered. As the minister to pagan luxury, Art had become enslaved. But it had entered in at "the strait gate," and therefore to it was given ever after to be the coadjutor of the holy faith in the mission of civilization. But it was not destined that its progress should be continuous and uninterrupted. Whatever may have been the cause of its decline after the sixth century, whether it was owing to the fury of the barbarian hordes, or to the uses to which it was applied, is open to question; but its decline was certainly contemporaneous with a new direction given to its exercise. In the innumerable works of the first six centuries are two remarkable omissions, remarkable on account of the degree in which the subjects so omitted absorbed the attention of both the artists and the community in after ages. Till the sixth or seventh century no representation of the blessed Virgin, as a Divine person, was known in the Church, neither had there been any consentaneous type of the character of her countenance. And until the middle of the sixth century, no trace of any representation of the consummating act of human salvation—the Crucifixion of our Lord—is to be found in any of the multitudinous productions of Christian Art. Soon after peace had been restored to the Church, by the accession of the barbarians to the faith, we see the introduction of the type of countenance in the portraits of the blessed Virgin, the fair sanguineous complexion, the gentle, devout expression we have since been accustomed to. At this period her representation in the Art of the Church began to assume a position of equal importance to that of our Lord Himself, who, as though having laid aside the book with which, as the Divine teacher, he had for centuries been constantly represented, is now depicted as bestowing the insignia of royalty on His earthly parent. After the introduction of this fashion of representation, the Likeness of our Lord suffered a marked depreciation. The dark brown hair and complexion, the emaciated, sorrowful, loving countenance that had till then formed the distinct and unvarying tradition, gave place to a likeness much more resembling that of His Virgin Mother. The hair became lighter, and often quite flaxen; the eyes, instead of being black, were rendered of a light blue; and a soft, smooth, feminine countenance usurped the place of that infinitely more impressive one that the early painters had handed down with such minute and unvarying fidelity. The divergence so established was the origin of what has been termed the Italian as distinct from the Byzantine type of the Likeness. But surely

this designation is in one respect erroneous, as the type followed in the first six centuries certainly originated among the Asiatic Greek countries. There is no tradition to connect it with Byzantium; and if by that name Constantinople is intended, we have seen that the Eastern tradition of the Likeness was brought to Italy centuries before that place had an existence.

With respect to the crucifixion of our Lord, the first instances in which its representation can be traced are in the metal images executed during the barbarian occupation of the sixth century. One of these figures, as far as can be ascertained the oldest extant, is given on the next page. The original is now in the Bibliotheca of the Vatican, and it is valuable as showing that though the execution and workmanship are the rudest possible, the intention of the workman was to adhere, as closely as he was able, to the received traditions of resemblance.

From this time the decline of Art was unmistakable. Not that it lacked encouragement, or that it was less cared for by the people; on the contrary, perhaps, never at any former period had painting and architecture been so generally practised and so lavishly encouraged as in that interval between the seventh and the thirteenth centuries. But the Arts, being no longer the expression of the spirit of the people, had ceased to exercise their highest and most distinctive functions. In the dark period of the Church's persecution, in the glorious morning of its emancipation, the spiritual life and feeling of the community found expression in its Art; but in the centuries which followed, it would be difficult to determine what the religious mind of the community actually was. The profound spirituality engendered by a long period of suffering and persecution had become extinguished; the exultation of the day of victory had passed away; and what manifestations of religious vitality still existed, would seem to have been confined to the ostentatious adornment of the sacred edifices by the laity, and to the fierce and interminable contests on theological dogmas on the part of the clergy. Under such circumstances it is not surprising that the arts of design became shorn of their highest significance. Architecture grew and flourished, as might have been expected from the prevailing taste for ecclesiastical adornment; but painting sank from the position it had previously occupied, as the coadjutor of the Church in its teaching, to that of a mere instrument of decoration. Nobly and gloriously, in an artistic point of view, it executed its new task, as is evidenced by the unrivalled and matchless examples of skill that have formed the wonder and the admiration of all succeeding ages; but in descending to the functions of the upholsterer, it lost the spirituality that attached to its higher calling; and a work of Art, from being an exponent and illustration of the faith, had become a mere item in the adornment of the walls of the building; or if, in any instances, it partook of its higher character, it was but as a medium of asserting some new point of doctrine that, for the time being, occupied more especially the attention of the Church; and the object of the painter seems to have been either the greatest amount of gorgeous decoration, or the most attractive rendering of the blessed Virgin, who had just been elevated to a place in the holiest of holies in the Christian temple second only to the highest.

It was impossible but that the depreciation in the purposes of Art observable during this period should extend itself also to its productions. Thus we see that the Likeness of our Lord, though reproduced more frequently than at any former period,



was delineated with that absence of feeling and spiritual vitality that might be expected from want of enthusiasm, and from diverted energy on the part of the painter.

It is no part of my purpose to follow the tradition of the Divine Likeness further through this period, my task being accomplished in having traced it back from the time when it is incontestable that it was in general acceptance, to the first age of the Church.

An inquiry of this nature is not without results other than the elucidation of a mere question of antiquity—interesting though that question be. The truth of the tradition of our Lord's Likeness appears to have been accepted by the first Christian communities without a shade of doubt. Afterwards, and, indeed, until the present century, it was tacitly admitted, and its authenticity having never been disputed, no one entered upon an examination with a view to support it. But doubts have been recently disseminated as to there being any foundation for our conceptions respecting the personal resemblance of the Saviour. And when we find these doubts entertained and promulgated especially by a class of writers professedly denying the authenticity of the Gospels, we are forced to conclude that in denying the traditional Likeness, and asserting that it originated in the artistic imagination of the sixth and seventh centuries, they intend thereby to infer a doubt of the truth of other records concerning the person represented.

In the pursuance of this investigation certain facts have presented themselves that, I believe, have not been hitherto noticed. The connection of the Veronica, or early Greek pictures, with a coherent and unbroken chain of evidence in support of their being the productions of the first age of the Church, has not before been attempted. The enamel pictures of our Lord and of the Apostles on the pateræ, buried with the earliest Christians; the evidence unintentionally afforded by the profane and blasphemous pagan caricatures of the crucifixion; the identification of the tradition of the Likeness with the introduction of the writings of S. John, and the preponderating influence exercised by those writings upon the Art of the early Church, have none of them been hitherto noticed. The questions on which further elucidation is desirable, are—firstly, the extent to which ecclesiastical decoration was carried in such churches as existed above-ground during the first three centuries, and which might have afforded a preparatory school for the production of the works of Art we see in such numbers, and possessing such high artistic power, in the age of Constantine; and, secondly, whether it is possible to obtain clear and satisfactory evidence in support of the authenticity of other of the early Greek pictures, besides those now preserved in Genoa and at S. Peter's, and thus add to the testimony that these ancient productions, worn by the first members of the Church, and buried with them in their graves, were, in repeated instances, executed at a time when they would have been brought under the direct notice of many who had seen our Lord.

